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"IF IT WOULD BE ANY RELIEF TO YOUR FEELINGS TO CALL ME AN IDIOT, VENETIA," SAID PAUL, "PLEASE DO SO!"

THE DEANS OF ASHLEY

[A NOVELETTE.]

(COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE title does not in the least refer to those dignitaries of the Church distinguished by the title of "Very Reverend," and whose business it is to preside over our

Cathedrals. Ashley, indeed, did not boast such a thing as a church, much less a cathedral, for it was not a town, or even a village—nothing in the world but a grand old mansion, surrounded by its own park and wide-spreading acres—a home which had once been the talk of the

country for its almost royal state and magnificence, and which had now fallen on evil fortunes, so that almost all its ancient glory had departed. But through the course of centuries, through wealth and poverty, the estate had always been in the possession of the same family, who were known far and wide as the Deans of Ashley.

That was all. Once it was whispered a baronetcy had been offered to the master of Ashley, and he had refused it with scorn. That was in the years when The Deans were rich and powerful, when their daughters married peers, and their sons won the fairest heiresses of the day. But all that was past and over now; and Ashley itself, had the old grey stone halls been able to speak, might have sighed "Ichabod," for the glory of the Deans had departed.

No one knew exactly when things began to go wrong. One Squire in a fit of pique against his eldest son left every penny he could alienate from the estate to his brother. The injured heir married beneath him, grew reckless, plunged into debt, and raised the first mortgage which had ever burdened the Ashley acres.

That was the first downward step; and nothing seemed to go right with the family afterwards until now the present Squire had made his son join with him in cutting off the entail, and then sent the young man adrift because he ventured to remonstrate with his father for bringing home a young and beautiful second wife.

There was a fearful quarrel. Kenneth Dean swore that he had been tricked into signing away his inheritance. The Squire retorted

he had a right to please himself. Then Kenneth went abroad, no one knew where, and soon there came a report of his death.

The new Mrs. Dean came home to Ashley, bringing two children of her own with her. For a little while there were great festivities at the Place. The bride was beautiful and fascinating, young; still, she loved society, and issued her invitations recklessly, never heeding the Squire's faint murmurs about her extravagance.

And so things went on until the old man woke up one day to find ruin staring him in the face; a wife and seven children, only five of them his own, to provide for, and creditors abusing him in every direction.

He had made his son join him in cutting off the entail, but he had a strong love for his ancestral home. He swore with a bitter oath that he would live and die Dean of Ashley, and then he sent for his lawyer to help him to keep his vow.

And kept it was. At what a cost only Mrs. Dean and her children knew.

The Park was let for grazing; the gardens and orchards were leased to a professional florist and fruiterer, who saw his way to making a pretty penny out of the bargain.

The outlying farms were sold. Half the proceeds went towards redeeming the mortgage, half to paying the most pressing debts.

And at last, when everything was settled, Mr. Dean informed his wife he could allow her four hundred a year, and whatever that failed to find her she must go without.

"Four hundred? But I thought your income was five thousand, Bryan?"

"It was once! I have arranged for my lawyer to retain such income as is left to me, and apply a certain part to reducing my debts. I reckon that four hundred a year is the utmost that can be spared for household expenses."

"But the children?"

"Well—there must be clothes enough to last for a good many years," said Bryan, grimly, "judging by the bills, at least. And there is plenty of room for a regiment of children in this great house. Ashley is the healthiest spot for miles, so we'll hope they won't want a doctor, and then you'll only have to think of food and shoe leather."

Poor Mrs. Dean! She had been extravagant, but she was terribly punished for it. She had believed her husband a rich man, and she had spent his money lavishly; but, after all, no worse sin could be laid to her charge. Throughout the whole miserable business it was Bryan Dean who deserved most blame.

Attracted by Lena Dacosta's beauty, he determined to marry her. He feared the fact of his property being entailed would prejudice the young widow against him, and so he persuaded his son to join him in freeing it.

He cast Kenneth adrift, because the young fellow remonstrated at the fraud practised on him when he discovered the entail had only been cut off to further his father's second marriage; and then too indolent even to warn his wife of her danger, he let her plunge into every fashionable extravagance, whilst he speculated wildly at the same time.

"Pity the Squire!" exclaimed Mr. Dean's lawyer, when a lady client ventured to suggest before him that the disasters at Ashley Place were all Mrs. Dean's work. "Pity the Squire and blame his wife. Why, my dear lady, it's just the reverse. I should feel inclined to do so. Mrs. Dean was utterly inexperienced in country life. She was young and fond of pleasure; no one warned her she was going beyond her husband's income."

"And now he has to suffer for it," said the lady, sympathetically.

"He won't suffer," said Lovel Clinton, sharply. "There is one person Bryan Dean will take care of through all reverses—himself. He will leave his wife and children to economise here, while he spends half the year at Homburg or London as a gay, elderly

bachelor. Oh, dear, no! All the tedium and monotony of poverty will fall on the others! The Squire knows how to look after himself."

And he did. For his own private use he kept just double the sum he allowed his wife for all household expenses. Mrs. Dean and the children lived at Ashley Place from January to December. The Squire found he required "change." He went to London directly after Easter, only returning to the Place in July. September he always spent at some continental health resort, and with visits at country houses afterwards, it was well on towards Christmas before he came home.

He really managed to be as popular in society as though he had been free from debts and children. The man was selfish to the backbone, and Lena Dean, when she came to know him as he was, regretted from the bottom of her heart her second marriage, and wished she had been content to remain Mrs. Dacosta, with a modest jointure of five hundred a year.

She forfeited every penny of this when she married again. The principal was in the hands of trustees until the children came of age, when it was divided equally between them. The interest or some portion of it could be appropriated to their education.

This was a godsend to Mrs. Dean. Maurice was only ten and Venetia eight when the crash came; and from a gay, country house Ashley Place was changed into a poverty-stricken prison. When the Squire hinted in pretty plain terms it was hard he should have to support another man's children, their mother was able to retort the boy and girl were provided for; and that, if he wished it, from that hour their expenses should be paid for out of their own small fortunes.

Happily the trustees were old and tried friends of Mrs. Dean. They understood how sore her heart must have been at having to come to terms with her story, and they made things as easy for her as the will of the late Mr. Dacosta permitted.

Maurice was to go to Marlborough at once, his school bills would be paid by them, and they would also pay his mother fifty pounds a year for his holiday expenses, clothes, etc. With regard to his sister, Venetia, seemed to young for school.

"If she stays at home she will grow up a drudge to the younger children," said Mrs. Dean, bravely. "In justice to my eldest girl, she must have the advantages her fortune entitles her to."

So Venetia had gone to school likewise, her holiday being spent at Ashley, though certainly not at the Squire's expense. And so the years went on very quietly, each one finding Bryan Dean a little more selfish than the last, until, just as Venetia was leaving school, her brother Maurice died.

A promising youth of nineteen, the darling of his mother's heart. He was cut off in an hour. A boating excursion had started for a summer afternoon of pleasure. There was a collision, and the little craft was upset. Only one of her passengers was killed—Lena Dean's only son.

The Squire came home to attend the funeral. He always posed as a prominent figure in any public event, and Maurice Dacosta had been a favourite at Ashley from the day of his first coming there after his mother's marriage.

"Good gracious, Lena!" he cried, complainingly, to his wife. "You look positively haggard, and you ought to be quite a young woman. You are not forty yet."

"I am thirty-nine, Bryan, and my life has been a troubled one for nearly ten years. You cannot wonder if I am aged."

"Well, at least things will be easier for you now," said the Squire, with a strange want of tact. "Poor Maurice's little fortune will come to you, and—"

"Are you, dreaming, Bryan? It goes to Venetia, every shilling of it. I am glad to feel I gain nothing by my boy's death."

"You should think of your other children," said the Squire, testily. "Remember, I can't

live for ever. You don't concern yourself much about my health, Lena; but I am not young."

She sighed. She could not tell him in so many words he had done nothing for his children, but she felt it.

"I have just concluded new arrangements," went on the Squire, pompously. "Clinton did not at all approve of them, but a man is not bound to submit to his lawyer in everything."

"Mr. Clinton is a very shrewd, clever man," said Lena, gravely. "I am sure he has your interests at heart, Bryan."

The Squire told his story at last; though, from his manner, it is possible he felt the least bit ashamed of what he had done.

The person who held the mortgage on Ashley had recently sold the claim on it to a stranger, and the latter had offered to remit all interest on the sum advanced during the Squire's life on condition that at his death the property reverted to the mortgagee.

It meant that Bryan Dean had more money to spend during his own lifetime, and that at his death his wife and children were homeless.

"I always said I would live and die Dean of Ashley," said the Squire, when he had related the most selfish act of his selfish career; and, of course, the girls are sure to marry, and you will have your settlements. If we had had a son I might have hesitated, but—"

His wife interrupted him with flashing eyes. "If we had had ten sons you would not have hesitated!" she said, scornfully. "My settlements, as you call them, bring in eighty pounds a year. You know two thousand was the amount you endowed me with!"

"The girls are sure to marry!" repeated the Squire, calmly. "Besides, there is Venetia. She will feel it a duty to help her mother and sisters."

Mrs. Dean let this pass.

"Who holds the mortgage now?"

"Really, my dear, I don't see that that matters. The name is King. I believe a most gentlemanly man, according to his solicitor. I consider that I have done very well for the old place. I was always fond of Ashley, Lena."

His wife, who, though she had had a foreign mother, and spent half her life abroad, was yet far more English at heart than the Squire, looked round the shabby yet beautiful, old drawing-room, with its quaint, picturesque, familiar furniture, and sighed.

"I thought you loved the place enough to keep it for your children. I have endured ten years of dreary poverty just in the hope that some day I should see Myrtle reigning here."

"Myrtle!" and the Squire spoke more bitterly than he felt, because he knew he had behaved cruelly. "Myrtle is a plain, awkward girl of fourteen. She looks all legs and arms, and her face is so freckled one can hardly bear to look at it. Myrtle would never make a fitting mistress for Ashley, my dear! If you had wished such a destiny for her you should have transmitted to her a little of your beauty."

Mrs. Dean turned very white. She could bear a good deal from him, but taunts about her children tried her patience.

"Myrtle has had no advantages," she said slowly. "Before she was five years old she was robbed of all chances of them."

"A good many women living rent free would find it possible to bring up five children decently on four hundred a year," retorted the Squire.

"You forget," said Lena, reproachfully. "you came home every year for weeks together, requiring the best of everything. The savings of months went to make you content for a few days. You have stood in the children's light, and robbed them of every little indulgence my economy might have given them."

"It's no use going on like this," said the Squire, placidly. "I am not a domesticated man, and I can't live on cold shoulder of mutton and rice pudding for the sake of my offspring. You ought not to expect it, Lena."



"I do not expect it. Report says you were even less considerate towards your first born. That you sent him from you without even the proverbial shilling given to prodigals."

"Don't mention Kenneth," said the Squire, with something like a groan. "Nothing has gone well with me since he left. Perhaps if my boy had lived, I might not have been the last Dean of Ashley. Lena, my wife, our marriage has not turned out very brilliantly for either of us, but reproaches won't improve things. As long as I live you will be no worse off than you are now, and I need not tell you that for the children's sakes I shall take care of myself. Try and find husbands for two or three of the girls, and then things will look up."

"Oh, Bryan, how you talk? Myrtle is not fifteen, and whom are they likely to see here? Besides," and the poor woman spoke nothing but the simple truth when she gave her opinion, "I think marriage brings people a great deal of trouble."

"Have it your own way, and don't blame me!" returned the Squire, as he flung out of the room in a rage.

The next day he was off to Paris, and poor Lena Dean was left alone with her tribe of daughters.

CHAPTER II.

Lovel Clinton still retained the conduct of the Squire's affairs; though, after the latter's arrangement with Mr. King, there was very little to manage; still there were a few rents to collect.

The few tenants had to be soothed in their various complaints of their landlord's neglect, and finally the incoming money had to be forwarded; the lion's share to the Squire's London banker, the minor portion to the modest red brick building in the cold country town of Morton, where Lena Dean kept her slender banking account.

Perhaps there was a fear in Mr. Clinton's mind that if he gave up the charge of her husband's affairs the poor lady might find some difficulty in getting her meagre allowance.

Perhaps he had worked so long for the Deans of Ashley that he clung to the last scion of the old race in spite of his faults.

The office of the Squire's agent was, of course, entirely honorary, but, then, Lovel Clinton was a rich man, and did not need to add to his wealth.

He had a kind, cheerful wife, and one only son, who was already a partner in his father's business, having said (when the choice of a career was given him), with delightful common sense, that as there had been a Clinton in Morton to manage people's legal matters for them for over two hundred years, he thought it was a pity they should not continue so to be.

Mr. Clinton, senior, was a good-bit younger than the Squire, and his son, Paul, was only seven-and-twenty.

In a country town, where there were very few men who had not been husbands and fathers for years, Paul was thought quite a confirmed old bachelor.

It was the custom in Morton for a man (this may account for the rarity of men in the little town) to marry as soon as ever he could afford it. If he saw no chance of being able to afford it soon he emigrated to London to improve his fortune. If the improvement came he fetched his bride.

In any case he never returned as a resident to Morton; and so to see a young man with an income of, say, two hundred a year, not married was a thing unheard of in the town.

Paul Clinton might have married years before. At least, everyone said so. Was he not known to be an only son? Had not the wealthy lawyer implored him to find a wife, and offered to give up the house in High Street to the young couple, and retire with his wife to a bijou residence a mile or two out? And were there not eligible girls by the dozen in Morton, if only young Clinton had looked about him instead of thinking only of his books and clients?

This was Paul's only blemish in the eyes of his neighbours. Except for his aversion (which, by-the-way, was taken for granted, since he had never confessed it) to the married state the young lawyer was very popular, and quite a townsman to be proud of.

Lovel Clinton and his wife were good enough to look over their boy's one blemish, and to be proud of him as it was; but then, of course, they could not be expected to understand the feelings of those who had grown-up daughters.

On a beautiful June morning the two lawyers, father and son, sat at breakfast. Mrs. Clinton was away on a visit to a married niece, who stood much in need just then of motherly care, so that the gentlemen were alone, and had, with true masculine unsociability, each his own pile of letters, which occupied time and attention, leaving none for conversation; but a sudden exclamation from the senior partner roused Paul sufficiently for him to inquire what was the matter.

"Either it's a hoax or the man's mad!" "What man? If it's the Squire of Ashley, sir, I incline to the opinion that he is mad!"

"What put him into your head?"

"Various trifles. The chief, I think, your excitement. You take more interest in the Squire's affairs than in your most profitable clients!"

"Don't pretend to be mercenary, Paul. It doesn't suit you, my boy."

"I detest Dean of Ashley," said Paul, with youthful intolerance. "I can't think how you put up with him. When I think of his wife and children I should like to knock him down!"

"Which would not help them particularly," said the elder man, drily. "Now, Paul, put aside your prejudice and listen to me. This letter is not from the Squire, but it concerns him."

"Has he robbed a bank?"

"Paul! Do you remember Fern Cottage, a little place on the Ashley estate where—"

"You need not go on, father. I remember it perfectly. As a schoolboy I went to a fête got up there in honour of poor Maurice Dacosta's birthday. It was just before the crash."

"Yes. The Squire never thought of letting Fern Cottage till then. It is a pretty little place, seven or eight rooms in all; but the gardens are large enough for a mansion, and old Miss Nairn took a fancy to the Cottage, and paid a hundred a year for it."

"Till she died, since which time it has been empty, and going to wrack and ruin. The last time I was at Ashley Place Mrs. Dean said if only she understood anything of gardening she would take the Cottage in hand herself and try and make something of the fruit, for the house would never let unless the Squire spent a large sum on repairs."

"Well, here is an offer to take Fern Cottage on a repairing lease, and pay the same rent as the last tenant."

"The woman must be mad!"

"It's a man," corrected Mr. Clinton, "and, what is more, a lawyer!"

"He can't know what a state the property is in."

"I should think he knew something about it. It is Isherwood who writes, the very man who managed the Squire's fine piece of business with Mr. King."

"Perhaps he wants it for King himself?"

"He wants it, he says, for a client of the name of Carew, a widower, with one child. He says that Mr. King will guarantee not to disturb the tenant, if we grant a lease of fourteen years. You see, as the Squire now only has a life interest in the property, no one would care to take a lease of it without some assurance from his successor."

Paul Clinton looked strangely thoughtful.

"I should have thought that no one beyond the immediate neighbourhood had ever heard of Fern Cottage."

"Miss Nairn had a great many friends. Some one who visited her may have spoken of the house to Mr. Carew."

"I don't see why we should trouble ourselves to put another hundred a year in the Squire's pocket," said Paul, irritably. "Not a penny of the rent will find its way to poor Mrs. Dean, I expect."

Lovel Clinton looked grave.

"I might persuade the Squire to let her have half of it. The windfall will be so unexpected he could hardly refuse. My only doubt is, living such a lonely life as Mrs. Dean does, would it be distasteful to her to have an utter stranger domiciled so near her?"

"She wouldn't mind that," replied Paul. "All good women have a partiality for motherless children. Depend upon it, however disagreeable or antiquated Mr. Carew was, she would put up with him for the sake of his child."

"Miss Carew may not be a child," hazarded the elder lawyer. "The letter says 'a widower with one daughter.' Mr. Isherwood adds that his client will call on me this morning to hear all particulars of Fern Cottage. He offers himself as Mr. Carew's reference, and adds that he will be an agreeable addition to Morton society."

"Morton society won't see much of the old gentleman unless he sets up a carriage! It's four miles if it's a step to Fern Cottage. I think you will have to receive Mr. Carew, father, and make the best of him. Perhaps, when he finds the cottage is utterly out of repair, and its gardens almost a wilderness, he may repent his offer."

"I wish he had not made it," said Mr. Clinton, testily. "I don't like surprises. I am too old for them. Well, Mr. Carew will hardly reach Morton before twelve. I have to go to two or three places, but I shall be in long before that."

Apparently the lawyer was mistaken in his conclusion. He had hardly left the house ten minutes, and it was barely half-past nine, when one of the clerks came in to Paul's private room to announce Mr. Carew.

"He asked if you would see him, Mr. Paul, when he heard your father was out. He says he wishes to return to London by an early train, and cannot call again."

"It's a nuisance," was Paul's private reflection, but his answer was, "All right, Sanders, show him in."

A surprise awaited Paul. Instead of the fussy, consequential personage he had expected, there entered a man in the pride of youth and health—a handsome and noble-looking specimen of an English gentleman. Carew stood six feet two, his shoulders were broad, his figure erect. His face was bronzed, as though he had spent many years beneath a foreign sky. A thick beard and moustache hid the lower portion of his face, but that it was a face to trust Paul felt instinctively. The dark hair was crisp and curly, a faint scar was visible on the broad forehead, and the large, grey eyes had in them a shade of melancholy. Paul Clinton was used to studying faces, and he decided promptly he should like Mr. Carew, though he wondered why in the world such a man should wish to bury himself at Fern Cottage.

A few remarks exchanged, and he found himself telling Mr. Carew so plainly.

"The house has not been inhabited for five years. Mr. Dean is too poor to spend a penny on it, and my father says it would take over a hundred pounds to put it in proper repair."

Carew nodded.

"Mr. Isherwood told me as much. I came down with him last week, and the old caretaker showed us all over the cottage and gardens."

"And you were not dismayed at their neglected state?"

"I should not have dreamed of taking the place without King's guarantee. I hear that Mr. Dean, of Ashley, is an old man, and that at his death the property passes to Mr. King. I have seen the latter, and am quite satisfied respecting his intentions."

"Then you have achieved more than my father. We at Morton have grown to look on Mr. King as almost a fictitious person. We

have heard so much of him and never seen him. Mr. Isherwood seems to do everything for him—even write his letters."

"Isherwood is a very clever fellow," replied Carew, "and his wife is charming! I left my little girl with her while I came down here."

"I suppose it was the Isherwoods who first told you of Fern Cottage?"

Mr. Carew slightly altered the question in his reply.

"Isherwood thought the place would agree with Dolly, my little girl I mean, and that was the only thing that mattered to me. Will you try and get this affair settled as soon as possible, Mr. Clinton? I will send in workmen the day the lease is signed, for I want to settle at Fern Cottage before much of the summer is over."

"Well," said Paul to his father, when the latter returned. "I have seen the Squire's future tenant, and his heart is set on Fern Cottage. Nothing I could say would dissuade him. Someone had told him the air would be good for his child, and he is red hot on it."

"Then Miss Carew is a child?"

"I never asked him. He called her 'his little girl.' He looked about thirty."

"Only thirty?"

"Well, he might be more. He is very sun-burnt, and holds himself like a soldier. I took quite a fancy to him, and begin to think with Mr. Isherwood he will be an acquisition to the neighbourhood."

"Did he mention the Deans?"

"Said he understood the Squire was an old man. Oh, you needn't look alarmed, sir! I assure you I never said a word against Mr. Dean!"

"I wonder what he will say to our having found him a tenant?"

"Very likely refuse him because he was not consulted in the first place. He's the most pig-headed, ungrateful man!"

"Paul!"

However, the Squire behaved better than Paul Clinton had predicted. He graciously approved of Mr. Carew, and in a burst of generosity declared that twenty pounds of the rent might go to his wife's account; the other eighty would be very useful to himself, for at his time of life a man required many little comforts.

"When did Dean of Ashley not require them?" asked Paul, sarcastically. "Well, sir, I shall go over to Ashley Place with the news. I shouldn't care for Mrs. Dean to hear from any outsider that Fern Cottage was let."

"It seems to me, Paul, you are always ready to go to Ashley Place," said Mr. Clinton, meaningly.

"Have you any objection?"

"Not the slightest, my boy. You know that for years my hope has been to see you marry, and I know no fairer, sweeter girl than Venetia Da Costa?"

"Venetia is the nicest girl I know," admitted Paul. "But you are running into a big mistake, sir; I shall never ask her to marry me."

"Why not?"

"Two or three reasons. I like her too much to marry her knowing I could not give her the romantic affection she would desire. Poor Venetia has had a very sad picture of matrimony before her eyes, and the consequence is she will remain single all her days, unless—"

"Unless what, Paul?"

"Unless she meets some mysterious hero, and falls in love with him before she knows what she is about. He would have to be a veritable knight of olden times to win her heart, for at present her one idea of men is that they are all a race of monsters, and that you—for whom she confesses a warm regard—are only the exception which proves the rule."

"Poor child!" exclaimed the lawyer, heartily. "Well, I don't know that one can wonder."

"Venetia's objections to matrimony will be a blessing to her half-sisters," said Paul,

sagely. "She will have five hundred a year of her own the day she comes of age; while, whenever the Squire dies there will be just eighty pounds per annum for her mother and one five children."

Mr. Paul Clinton reached Ashley Place at seven. He had been a frequent visitor there ever since the days when he and Maurice Da Costa were as close friends as the five years between them warranted.

Mrs. Dean trusted him and his father implicitly. All the children regarded Paul almost as a big brother, and even Venetia admitted that he was "nearly as nice as his father."

Mrs. Da Costa was twenty now, and the fairest maiden in all the neighbourhood. Alone of Mrs. Dean's daughters she had inherited her mother's wondrous beauty, while years of care and trouble had given her a thoughtfulness and gravity which her mother had never possessed in her youth.

Venetia's face had more character and intellect than Mrs. Dean's, but the girl was not in the least a strong-minded, dictatorial young person.

She clung to her mother with the tenderest affection. She was goodness itself to her five sisters—but Venetia was only human—she simply detested her stepfather; regarding him as the blight on all their lives, and with the intolerance and sweeping verdict of youth poor Venetia honestly believed that mankind in general were as selfish and unfeeling as the only member of the sex she was familiar with—Dean of Ashley.

There were plentiful signs of poverty to greet Paul Clinton on every side as he walked up the avenue which led to Ashley Place.

The chestnuts were in the first beauty of their blossoming—hardly full blown as yet, but still sufficiently out to give promise of their future glory; the sky was cloudless, perfect blue.

But, alas! though Nature had been bountiful, art and labour, whose expenditure both need money, were sadly wanting.

The lodge was shut up, the railings were rusty for want of paint, the gravel walk was so full of weeds that, but for the chestnut trees, it would have been difficult to determine where the turf ended and the gravel began. Paul could remember when the lawns of Ashley had been smooth as velvet, the flower beds brilliant all the summer. The beds were neglected and trampled on now, and the grass was rough and uneven, being now at the mercy of the farmer's sheep being turned out there to graze, instead of the care and pride of an army of gardeners with their mowing machines. A high wire fence cut off the narrow portion of ground still reserved for the private use of the Deans.

Paul pushed open a little gate in the fence and entered. He came at once upon two of the children busy gardening—nice little girls enough, in blue galatea frocks and holland pinafores. But, alas! with that marked absence of beauty to which their father had referred so cruelly.

"Where's your mother, Lily?" asked Paul, when he had good-naturedly assisted to remove a hard-rooted weed which resisted all childish efforts. "I want to speak to her."

"Please don't," pleaded the youngest of the Deans, simply. "Mr. Stubbs came here last night to 'speak to' mother, and she has been crying ever since!"

Paul patted the childish head kindly.

"I won't make her cry. And Venetia—"

"Venetia is very angry," replied the little girl, simply; "but she says it is only what she expected, and she is not at all surprised."

"But what has happened?"

"I don't know."

The other small gardener here thought it time to join in the conversation.

"No. They didn't tell any of us children, not even Myrtle; but Myrtle says she knows

it is something dreadful, because Venetia has written to Mr. Arundel."

Mr. Arundel was the only survivor of Miss Da Costa's guardians. That she had written to him did seem to imply something very untoward had happened.

Paul hesitated. Should he go on to the house, or would his presence seem an intrusion at such a time? The question was settled for him by the little girls.

"Here comes Sissie," they cried, in a breath, "she'll tell you if you can see mother."

He left the small gardeners at their work, and went on to meet Venetia. If, indeed, trouble had befallen the Deans he would rather hear of it out of earshot of the Squire's little daughters.

Miss Da Costa was just twenty. She had been educated at a first-rate school, and was accomplished in the best sense of the word; but for the last three years she had lived at Ashley Place, the sharer of her mother's sorrows, and the life had given a touch of bitterness to her temper, sweet though it naturally had been.

If only Venetia could have loved and looked up to anyone she would have softened into a noble woman. As it was, she loved no one but her mother and the children, and looked up to no human creature.

She was a charming girl even in her attempted cynicism and defiant wilfulness, but if the charm was to continue when her girlhood was past she needed softening.

"What is the matter, Venetia?"—he called her by her name as a matter of course, having known her from the time she was two years old. "The children seem impressed with the fear something dreadful has happened."

"Poor little things!" and her voice softened for an instant. "Do you know, Paul, I can't help being fond of them, though they are his children."

"And what is the matter? You had better tell me. You know of old I never betray your confidence, and I may be able to help."

"No one can do that. You know Stubbs?"

"Unfortunately I have not that honour, but I gleaned from the children he was connected with the disaster. They said he 'wanted to speak to their mother,' and she had been crying ever since!"

"Well, Stubbs is a lively stableman at Greyling. I should have thought you would have heard of him!"

"You forget, young lady, that though Greyling is only seven miles from Ashley Place, it is twelve from Morton. No doubt Mr. Stubbs employs a Greyling lawyer, and I, if I required a lively stable, should patronise those in my own town."

"Well, it seems whenever the Squire has been here for the last three years he has been to Stubbs for horses and carriages, of course forgetting such a trifling item as the bill. The poor man struck last spring, and refused to give further credit, and the Squire took offence, and declared he would not pay a penny on account of the fellow's insolence. I suppose a summons would have come here, only our worthy relative departed before it could be issued. He has been abroad ever since, and poor Stubbs is at his wits' end. He has lost several customers through the Squire's spite. For, of course, people remarked he no longer patronised Stubbs, and he invented a very plausible reason. Finally, the unfortunate lively stableman gets into debt himself, and will be turned out into the streets if he does not pay his rent by quarter-day!"

"Don't go on, Venetia. I can guess the rest. Mrs. Dean paid him out of her own pocket."

"Her will was good, but unfortunately two hundred odd pounds is more than six months' income. She gave Stubbs a cheque for every shilling she had in the bank, and, because I knew she would break her heart if trouble came to the man through her worthless hus-

band, I have written to ask my trustee to advance the rest."

"Venetia, that was foolish!" "It was idiotic!" returned the girl, frankly; "but what could I do. Mr. Arundel will be sending mamma fifty pounds for my board in three weeks' time. If he chooses to advance it well and good."

"But afterwards. Two hundred pounds will make a great gap in your mother's income."

"Of course. She has been crying ever since to think how she is to manage. I tell her to send away one of the maids, and to cultivate a taste for vegetarian diet. If only we could live on the fruits of the earth we should get on triumphantly, but unluckily we all, even the children, have a marked partiality for carnivorous food."

"Venetia, do be serious."

"My dear Paul, I never was more so. Starvation stares us in the face. I have suggested to mother various ways of increasing our resources, such as turning a mangle or copying circulars; but she is not of an enterprising spirit, and positively declines to regard either employment as the high road to fortune!"

"Venetia!"

"Well," said the girl, almost pettishly, "what do you want? Would you rather I sat down and cried? As mother does nothing else it would make the domestic atmosphere unpleasantly damp and depressing to the children, and I don't see the use of it. But—"

"I can't bear to see you so flippant."

Her mood changed then, and a strangely softened look came into her face.

"I am sorry, really, Paul. I would do anything in the world for mother and the children, only how can I help them? If I went out as a governess Mr. Arundel would stop the allowance for my board. You see, he has some power over me. If I took in plain needlework he would make a fuss, and there's nothing else."

"You mustn't think of that," said Paul, gravely. "You know, Venetia, I feel about the Squire pretty much as you do; only I can't bear to abuse him before his wife and children."

"Well," and the girl drew a sigh of relief, "in the very impoverished state of our household I should say he would not trouble us with a visit this summer. There's one thing to be thankful for."

"You have never asked me why I came to-night, Venetia?"

"To tell you the truth," she said, with a charming smile. "I have come to take your visits like the sunshine, as a matter of course. Had you any special reason for coming to-night?"

He told her about Fern Cottage, and how the Squire had agreed that twenty pounds of the rent should go to her mother.

"One-fifth!" she said, with a little toss of her head. "Isn't he generous? But, Paul, the man must be mad!"

"I thought so till I saw him."

"And then how did he convert you to a belief in his sanity?"

"I took a fancy to him."

"Paul, you will never grow up," said Venetia, reprovingly. "Why, I have given up 'taking fancies' years ago, and you at twenty-seven, a fully-qualified lawyer, to continue the weakness! It's babyish of you!"

"Well, it's a fact."

"And your father?"

"He hasn't seen Mr. Carew."

"Carew!" repeated the girl, musingly. "It's rather a good name. Does he belong to the Carews of Salfley?"

"I really didn't ask him."

"And what is his profession, or rather, what was it? He must have retired if he means to settle in such a remote place as Fern Cottage."

"Unfortunately I forgot to inquire. Venetia, I can see contempt written in your eye. If

it would be any relief to your feelings to call me an idiot, please do so."

"I think your simplicity is touching!"

"You need not be anxious about your step-father's rent. Carew's reference is Isherwood, the lawyer."

"Ah! Then he is at least respectable."

"He looked so."

"Perhaps he has some incurable disease, and wants to spend the end of his life in seclusion. Did you say he was married?"

"I didn't say, but he is a widower, with one daughter."

"Poor girl! Fancy bringing a fashionable young lady to rusticate in such a spot!"

"My dear Venetia, Miss Carew is not in the least what you mean when you talk of a young lady."

"Oh!" Venetia's eyes opened. "You mean she is of uncertain age—an old maid, in fact? Well, if she is not young enough to think of dances and lovers, and that sort of thing, she may make herself contented here."

"I am certain she is not the age to think of such vanities. I believe she and her father are devoted to each other, and that they will be very happy here."

"And what is this disease?"

"I am not a doctor," remarked Paul, mischievously, leaving her in the false impression that Carew was a tottering old gentleman, and his daughter a middle-aged spinster; "but I should think possibly it was excitability. I never saw anyone more anxious about anything than he was getting about Fern Cottage."

"I daresay mother will go and call on Miss Carew if she is not very objectionable."

"I am sure it will be a kindly act."

"And when are they coming?"

"Just as soon as the cottage can be got ready."

And then, deciding not to trouble poor Mrs. Dean in her grief, Paul Clinton said good night to Venetia, and went home.

Mr. Arundel answered his ward's letter in person. He was a kind-hearted man, but he had not the slightest pity for Dean of Ashley, and he would not waste a penny of Miss Dacosta's fortune on paying his debts.

Venetia secured half-an-hour alone with her guardian, and he put her position before her more plainly than she had ever understood it before.

The fortune left by her father had largely increased in the last eighteen years, since not above half the interest had been spent since Mrs. Dacosta forfeited the income; whilst since Maurice died something less than a quarter had sufficed for his sister's expenses.

The money in the funds, Mr. Arundel told Venetia, amounted to twenty-four thousand pounds. This would be settled on her absolutely before she married, but as long as she remained single she could only receive the interest.

"Then next May I shall have over seven hundred a year!"

"No, my dear. Your father was a jealous man, and he foresaw his wife's second marriage. His will was so worded as to prevent her from benefiting from your generosity. Up to thirty if you reside with your mother you only receive a hundred a year for your board, and half as much again for your private expenses. At the age of thirty, married or single, you enjoy the whole interest."

"But it sounds cruel!"

"My dear Venetia, there are, unfortunately, cases on record where a girl, whose marriage deprived her relations of their support, suffered very bitterly in consequence. Mr. Dacosta's idea was to pave the way for your marrying young. You can see for yourself that, kind and loving as your mother is, she possesses no strength of character. Had your fortune been under her control she would have sacrificed it long ago for the benefit of her second husband."

"Then can I do nothing to help her?"

"I should imagine your companionship and the sum paid for your board made a very great help. You can do no more for the next ten years—unless you marry."

"I shall never marry."

"Well, if you change your mind," said the old gentleman, smiling, "and the husband you choose is worth his salt, he will not object to a clause in your settlements giving a little help—say two hundred a year from your income to Mrs. Dean for her life."

Venetia summed up Mr. Arundel's decision to her mother in these cheerful terms—

"It's no use, dear, he can't help us, so we had better all turn vegetarians on the spot. Unfortunately, Mary cooks vegetables rather worse than she does everything else; but, no doubt, with constant practice, she will improve. Cabbages and carrots seem most abundant just now, so I should suggest cabbage soup, with an after course of carrot pudding for dinner."

CHAPTER III.

"Have you seen Fern Cottage?"

It was just three weeks since Mr. Carew had signed his agreement to take the deserted house on a long lease, and now this question was in everyone's mouth.

The village people, the townfolks from Morton and Greyling, ay, and a few county families from the beautiful outlying estates, were all much interested in the stranger whose coming amongst them was fixed for the first of July.

Money had been spent lavishly. Quite an army of workmen and gardeners had been employed within and without and to the intense satisfaction of the village, which was very clannish, a man who had once been employed at Ashley Place, and who was born and bred in the neighbourhood, had been engaged as Mr. Carew's factotum, while his wife was to be housekeeper and general manager.

Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins had been at the Place when Lena Dean came home a bride. It was natural they should retain a grateful recollection of the beautiful mistress whom they had left before her downfall. And meeting Venetia and her mother in the village lane one night, Mrs. Hawkins could not resist pouring out the story of their good fortune.

"The best wages we ever had, ma'am, and Mr. Carew's a gentleman, every inch of him. If you could but see the Cottage, it looks fit for a palace. The furniture came in to-day; if I might make bold to ask you to step in and look round. The master and Miss Carew are coming to-morrow."

"Have you seen Miss Carew?" demanded Venetia, who was curious on this point.

"No, miss, nor her pa neither. But they must be real gentry, from the furniture."

"Which means they have money," reflected Venetia, rather indignantly.

But she was curious to see Fern Cottage in its new aspect, and persuaded her mother to accept Mrs. Hawkins's invitation to look at it.

The house was built entirely on two floors, and in the rear, shut off from the main building by a flowering hedge, was a funny little erection of two rooms put up by Miss Nairn for her servants.

This hut was to be the abode of Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins; the gardener, coachman, and groom were to have cottages in the village. Only Miss Carew's maid would sleep under the same roof as her mistress.

Two of the three sitting-rooms were furnished as library and dining room; the third was a puzzle to the visitors—the largest and most elegant apartment in the house, which had formerly been the drawing-room, now it was carpeted all over with dark green felt. The walls were covered with pictures, but of furniture proper there was hardly any. A huge wooden cupboard at one end, an armchair and a low one, a small round table—this was actually all Mr. Carew had sent to fill a room sixteen feet by twenty!

The dining-room made up for it. It was a most home-like, cosy room, and the library.

made Venetia feel covetous, so luxurious and tasteful did it seem.

She thought, however, in Miss Carew's place she should have had her piano and easel in the drawing-room; it was so much larger and airier.

"Perhaps Mr. Carew is an author, and wants an empty room to pace up and down in when he is planning his stories. What lovely pictures he has! I think that is the most beautiful face I ever saw. It surely can't be Miss Carew herself!"

She was looking at the picture of a lovely girl dressed in virgin white, with a bunch of forget-me-nots in her hand. It stood over the fireplace in the "empty room," as Venetia called the former drawing-room, and was beautiful, not only for its subject, but as a work of art. Venetia felt by instinct the portrait had been painted by a master-hand.

"Oh, no, miss!" said Mrs. Hawkins, promptly. "Miss Carew's name is Dorothy, and you can see yourself this picture has Mary engraved on the frame. It's most likely just a fancy likeness!"

"How do you know Miss Carew's name is Dorothy?"

"There's a beautiful set of white statues, miss" (Mrs. Hawkins called them statuettes, "and the case they came in was written on, 'for Dorothy's room.' It's a good name, Miss Venetia, though a homely one."

"Well, I think Miss Carew will have a lovely home!" said Venetia, with something like a sigh. "Mother, we must be going home. You'll come and call on her soon, won't you?" this last was added when they had started to walk back to the Place.

"My dear, child, if these people are rich they can't want to know us. What pleasure would it be to an old man, and his prim, middle-aged daughter, to visit such a dreary house as ours, when the only cheerful thing about is the children's voices!"

"You must call, mother!" said Venetia, decidedly. "I am so curious to see what the Carews are like. You might ask them to tea. That would not ruin us. I suppose we may cling to the cup that cheers, even if cabbages are in future to be the main feature of our other repasts!"

But Mrs. Dean had of late years shrunk from all social intercourse, and she delayed calling at Fern Cottage, so that the acquaintance with the Carews came about by accident, after all, more than a week after their arrival.

Lily and Violet, the youngest of the Ashley children, were gathering wild flowers in the wood, which bordered one side of their father's grounds, when they suddenly came face to face with a little girl in a white frock and crimson cloak, who ran up to them sobbing out that she was lost.

The sisters were only twelve and thirteen, but no doubt they seemed quite venerable protectors to the mite of five, who clung to them piteously, saying that she was "Dolly," and was so tired and hungry.

"She must be staying with the Carews," suggested Violet. "We had better take her there."

"That's papa," volunteered Dolly. "He's Mr. Carew, and we only came here a little while ago. Do take me home, please. Papa will be so glad!"

There was no resisting the small damsel's entreaties. Lily and Violet each took a hand, and between them they half led, half carried, Miss Carew to the gate of Fern Cottage, where her father met them, looking much relieved at the sight of his little runaway.

"You must come in and rest," he said, kindly, to the two girls. "It was very good of you to be so kind to Dolly. You naughty child, don't you know you might have been lost in the wood like poor little Red Riding Hood?"

"No wolf now," said Dolly, wilfully, "and good little girls bring me home. I want my tea!"

"You shall have it by all means, you small philosopher, and perhaps these young ladies

will have some with you. Will you tell me your names, my dears?"

"I am Violet Dean, and this is my sister Lily," replied the elder of the two visitors. "We live at Ashley Place!"

Perhaps something of his landlord's selfish character had been told to Mr. Carew, for a shadow flitted across his face, as he heard the name of Dean. It soon passed away, and he played the part of a very hospitable host to the little girls.

"They are very nice," said Dolly, approvingly. "Will they come again if their dad lets them?"

It was comical to see the way in which the little creature clung to her father; the tall, soldierly man and the tiny child seemed all the world to each other.

Mr. Carew smiled.

"I fancy there is someone else to be considered, Dolly. These young ladies are more fortunate than you. They have a mamma."

"Mother is never cross!" said Lily, frankly. "She lets us do anything in the world, so long as it isn't wrong. The Squire won't; he thinks we are a great mistake."

"Why," inquired Mr. Carew, gravely.

"He didn't say. He told mother once he hated children, but if he had to have a big family it was a pity they were all the wrong sort! That was before he went away last time."

"Does not your father live at home?"

"Oh, no! He always wants a change!" said Lily, naively. "He says a month of us is too much for him. He goes away to London or Paris, while mother takes care of us!"

"But doesn't mother ever have a change?"

"Mother can never afford a holiday," said Lily, candidly. "She went to Morton once, three years ago; but she generally sends Venetia. She says Sissie ought to have a treat."

If to go three miles to a little market town was considered a treat, surely these children's lives must be dull enough!

"I will take you home," said Mr. Carew, when they had finished tea. "I want to ask Mrs. Dean if she will let you come sometimes to play with my little girl."

Before he reached Ashley Place he had quite won the childish hearts, and had gleaned a pretty correct idea of the state of things in the Squire's family. The little girls made no complaints, but it was easy to see they feared their father above all else, and the love of their hearts centred round their mother and elder sister.

"Venetia is so good," said Lil, simply, as they turned in at the big gates. "Betty says she might go away and be a great lady any day, if it wasn't for us!"

Mrs. Dean received her visitor with a quiet grace; and Carew, who had heard of her long ago in her prosperous days as a queen of fashion, and an extravagant beauty, was touched by the pithos of her face.

"I hope you will forgive my intrusion," he said, courteously; "but my little girl has fallen in love with your daughters, and I have promised to beg you to let them come and play with her sometimes."

Mrs. Dean looked bewildered.

"Are you really Mr. Carew?"

"Assuredly. I hope you do not doubt me?"

"It is all Paul's fault," said Venetia, indignantly. "He made us think you were about eighty, Mr. Carew, and that your daughter was a middle-aged lady!"

"Dolly is just five!"

"Venetia," said her mother, "how could you make such a mistake?"

"It wasn't my fault," said Venetia, pouting.

"Paul Clinton was talking about Mr. Carew, and I said Miss Carew would be moped to death if she was used to balls and parties, and he told me when I saw her I should understand she was not of an age to care for such things."

Carew was laughing heartily.

"And you, forthwith imagined her a prim,

strong-minded spinster of fifty, my poor little Dolly. I quite understand it all."

"And, of course, that big empty room is to be her nursery?" exclaimed Venetia. "Do you know, Mr. Carew, I decided you were an author, and required plenty of room to stalk up and down while you planned out your stories!"

He joined heartily in the laugh that followed, and somehow that laugh broke down all constraint, and Mrs. Dean began to feel as though she had known her husband's tenant for years.

"I am afraid you will find the Cottage very dull, Mr. Carew!" she said, kindly. "My husband always says this place is beyond the pale of civilisation."

"I am not afraid," he answered, gravely. "I have been away from England so long that there is something delightful in being back in my native land once more, and I think the country round here looks lovely! I hope you will let your children come and see Dolly, Mrs. Dean. She has rather a lonely life, poor little thing!"

"They shall come willingly," she answered. "There are too many of them for us to feel dull. My husband says six girls are quite an affliction, but I have never found them too many."

"The Squire would have found six boys a great deal more expensive," retorted Venetia, hotly. "They are dear little things, and he ought to feel proud of them."

"Doesn't he?" asked Mr. Carew, gravely, when Venetia had turned to walk down to the gate with him—a mark of courtesy she always showed to their rare visitors.

"The Squire is proud of nothing that does not contribute to his own comfort," she said, scornfully. "If ever you make acquaintance with my stepfather, Mr. Carew, you may boast you have seen the most selfish of men!"

"Your stepfather?"

"Oh, yes. I am not a Dean, or perhaps I should not speak so freely. I was two years old when mother married the Squire, and it was just the most unlucky day of her life!"

Carew smiled.

"I hope you do not say that because he has been unfortunate!"

"I say it because I detest him! He doesn't trouble us much. He only comes home about twice a year, and I can assure you those are not joyous occasions. Even the children are afraid to laugh, and mother looks scared to death. The head of the family has a most depressing influence over us all!"

"I should think you were very easily depressed, Miss—Venetia?"

"My name is Dacosta," said Venetia, quietly; "and, of course, I have to stand up for the rest. I am a strong-minded young woman, Mr. Carew."

"I doubt it. You don't look the character."

"Oh, I haven't taken to blue spectacles and semi-masculine attire, but my principles are quite decided. I think men are a great mistake, and that women ought not to let themselves be trampled on."

Carew was laughing. "You speak as though the said trampling were our favourite occupation, Miss Dacosta?"

"Well," said Venetia, thoughtfully, "I think it is!"

"Your experience must have been unfortunate."

"I don't know many men. Our lawyer, Mr. Clinton, is devoted to his wife, and a really kind considerate person, but then I look on him as the exception that proves the rule."

"Do you mean the gentleman you call 'Paul'?"

"No, his father. Paul is utterly spoilt; his way in life has been too easy. His position is ready-made, and he is sure to end by marrying some silly girl, who will let him rule over her like a monarch!"

"He did not strike me as such a masterful man. Is the young lady already found?"

"I believe not; but the girls at Morton are incorrigibly silly. I believe any one of them would feel flattered if Paul Clinton asked her to marry him!"

"Well, Miss Da Costa, I am afraid I can't rise to the heights of your reasoning. If my Dolly were grown up I should feel flattered at such a man as Paul Clinton falling in love with her. I took an immense fancy to the young fellow, do you know?"

CHAPTER IV.

"What do you think of Carew?"

It was a month or so later. Venetia Da Costa and Myrtle had been spending the day with Mrs. Clinton, and Paul was walking with them in the pleasant, old-fashioned garden, after the simple high tea, to which the lawyer's wife clung in preference to a formal late dinner.

"I don't think at all! It is no concern of mine if he likes to be absurd!"

"My dear girl, that very remark implies you have thought about Mr. Carew, or you wouldn't call him absurd."

"I hate mysteries!"

"But in this case what mystery exists? I am sure Carew lives openly enough. He never shuts himself up, or courts retirement. He welcomes visitors at any hour, and accepts most of the invitations that he receives. You are prejudiced against him because he is the Squire's tenant!"

"I am not prejudiced at all! And I say he is mysterious. He never mentions his past life."

"Yes he does, Venetia," put in Myrtle, rather timidly. "He came to tea with Dolly one day last week when you were out, and he told mother he was so anxious about her because her mother died of consumption, and that he thought South America did not suit her, and that is why he brought her home."

"There, Venetia!" said Paul, triumphantly. "Confess you were wrong!"

"I shan't! I keep to my own opinion. Mr. Carew is mysterious! He is evidently rich. I suppose, Paul, you won't deny that!"

"He is decidedly rich. Query, is being rich mysterious?"

"I won't talk at all if you interrupt me! Why in the world should a rich man come to Fern Cottage? Mr. Carew might have bought an estate in the country, or rented a house at some fashionable watering-place? Why in the world should he bury himself in this lonely place, when the only neighbours within walking distance are cottagers and ourselves? Then he never speaks of himself. Whether he made his money in trade, or came into it through a relation's death, or was born to it, who knows? When did he leave England? Why did he go? Where are his relations and his wife's? Why, with all his wealth, does he choose to live in a little cottage? Tell me this, and then I'll admit he is not mysterious!"

She saw Mrs. Clinton and her husband coming out of the house, and went to join them. Myrtle and Paul were left alone.

"Well, Myrtle," said the young man good-temperedly, "How cross we have made Venetia. Why in the world does she speak so bitterly against poor Carew?"

Myrtle shook her head. She was better looking now than when the Squire spoke so cruelly of her plainness.

Her complexion had cleared, her auburn hair shone like silk in the sunlight, and there was something interesting about her wistful smile, and the sensitive lines of her mouth.

Venetia was a beauty, but her half-sister's face had a strange, pathetic charm of its own. Paul wondered, as he looked at Myrtle to-night, how they could ever have thought her plain.

"I think Sissie is annoyed with Mr. Carew," Myrtle said, frankly. "You know we are so used to her ruling us, we all like it; and sometimes, when she is declaiming

about women's rights, and telling mother what to do, Mr. Carew looks at her in a puzzled way, as though he felt bewildered, and she does not like it."

"I believe you are right, Myrtle," said Paul, struck by a sudden thought. "We are all used to bow down before Venetia, and accept her sway. Perhaps we have spoiled her a little among us, and now she strikes a stranger as dictatorial and unamiable. Is that what you mean?"

Myrtle nodded.

"Mother likes Mr. Carew, and he has been, oh! so kind to the children. He seems always thinking of how to give them pleasure, and it is done so nicely, Paul, just as though he did not see how poor we are. The little ones are quite fond of him, and mother said once she was thankful he had come to Fern Cottage."

"And Venetia?"

"Sissie said it was only a refined kind of charity, and that she hated taking alms. And now, Paul, whenever Mr. Carew comes she tries to avoid him. It is such a pity."

"We have spoiled her, that's about it," said Paul, gravely. "Don't fret, Myrtle, it'll come right."

Myrtle shook her head.

"Venetia is so beautiful," said the girl, who had been taught from childhood that she was plain, "and so things from her must wound people, and she is always trying to snub Mr. Carew."

"I rather think Carew is old enough to take care of himself, Myrtle," said Paul, lightly; "and as to snubbing people, it's a way Venetia has. Why, I'm sure she has snubbed me unmercifully, and I don't think she's over gentle with you."

"But I am so stupid," said Myrtle, sadly. "You see, Venetia is so bright and clever; it's not wonderful she can't have patience with me. I often think, perhaps, when Sissie is married, and I have to be the eldest daughter, mother will be dreadfully vexed that I am so clumsy."

"You are not clumsy, Myrtle. It's just a way you have got into of comparing yourself with Venetia, and fancying you must be an ignoramus because you are not just like her! If only you would come out, and have a little more courage, you would be another creature. You just let Venetia sit on you instead of standing up for your rights!"

"But I haven't got any rights!" said Myrtle, simply. "I shall never be like Venetia!"

"Never!" said Paul, with a droll smile. "Why, before Venetia was seventeen (you're seventeen now, aren't you, Myrtle?) she ruled the whole family, and was quite as grown up and dignified as she is now. I can't fancy you ruling the family, and administering snubs all round when they displeased you."

"I never could," confessed Myrtle; "but when Sissie is married I shall have to try."

"Don't!" said Paul Clinton, laughing, "you would never succeed; and, mark my words, Myrtle, one gets tired of always being kept in order. Let the mother and children have an easier way if you ever become the eldest daughter at home, but I don't think you ever will."

"Mother says Venetia is sure to marry, because she is so pretty."

"I don't think she will marry yet awhile," replied Paul, gravely, "and I believe you will never be left at Ashley Place without her."

They went indoors then, and Paul Clinton made no attempt to explain his speech; only when the sisters had driven off in his mother's comfortable brougham he stood by the open window watching the carriage till it was out of sight, and old Mrs. Clinton, noticing the grave look on his face, said wistfully—

"I really think you're heart is caught at last, Paul, and that you will bring me home a daughter. Venetia grows lovelier every time I see her."

"I would not marry Venetia Da Costa, mother, if there was no other woman in the

world; she is eaten up with pride and self-will. Nothing but a great sorrow or a passionate love will ever soften her."

Mrs. Clinton defended her favourite bravely. "I am sure, Paul, she is a most amiable girl, a model daughter and sister. What would they have done at Ashley Place all these years without her?"

"I think they would have learned their own value," replied Paul. "Venetia sits upon them all till Mrs. Dean is a nonentity in her own household, and Myrtle is treated as a little girl in pinafores."

"Myrtle is nothing but a child!"

"She is a very affectionate, sweet-tempered girl," said Paul, gravely, "and I fancy would do more to make home happy than Miss Da Costa, with all her beauty and genius. A man might do worse than marry Myrtle Dean, mother, although she will never be a beauty, and has not a penny of fortune."

Perhaps he was hard on Venetia, and did not understand all she was suffering in those summer days, for Venetia had a grievance peculiarly her own. She was intensely proud, and it hurt her deeply that her mother and the children should accept kindnesses out of their power to return. Claude Carew was always sending presents of choice fruit, poultry, cream, and new-laid eggs. He insisted on the children spending the day with Dolly once or twice a week, and he delighted in lending his pretty basket carriage to Mrs. Dean whenever he could prevail on her to go for a drive.

Venetia ought to have been pleased. She knew that her mother had often longed for such an enjoyment, that she had little strength for walking, and that change of scene was really a benefit to her. After the vegetarian diet suggested by Venetia, such gifts as Mr. Carew's were an immense blow. He never missed them, and they made a great difference to the fare at Ashley Place. They were offered, moreover, with a delicacy and taste which could not have been surpassed, and yet Miss Da Costa was angry, and called their new acquaintance presuming and ill-bred.

"He will walk in next with a quarter loaf under one arm and a pound of tea under the other!" she cried, irritably, the day after their visit to Mrs. Clinton, when Mr. Carew had taken advantage of her absence to read some grouse he had received from a friend in Scotland. "Mamma, have you no pride?"

"Very little, I am afraid, Venetia. It has been so crushed out of me; and, besides, I am sure Mr. Carew means kindly. He is a perfect gentleman."

"And we are beggars!"

"My dear child," said the mother, fondly. "You, at any rate, are not a beggar. If the shifts of our life here are too painful to you, shall I write to Mr. Arundel, and ask him to find you a more congenial home? I cannot bear for our trials to distress you."

Venetia stamped her foot.

"That would make me miserable. Mother, don't you know I would rather starve with you than go away? I only ask you not to accept such gifts from a stranger."

"But, Venetia, it would hurt Mr. Carew if I were to refuse, and he so counts on the children's companionship for little Dolly. He says she looks ever so much stronger since they came to Fern Cottage."

New, perhaps, Venetia was inconsistent. She professed to hate the father. She never lost a chance of snubbing him, but she was devoted to Dolly. The little maid had taken a violent fancy to Miss Da Costa, and it was fully returned. There was nothing Venetia would not do for Mr. Carew's daughter, while her manner to himself was barely civil.

"Is the Squire coming home this year?" asked Venetia, letting the subject of Mr. Carew's benefits drop. "The children say you had a letter yesterday. I was hoping now we were in August he did not mean to trouble Ashley Place this side of Christmas."

"Venetia, do remember he is my husband!" Venetia pouted.

"I am not likely to forget it. Well, mother, is your husband coming here this year?"

"No!"

"Then why did he write?" Then, catching sight of her mother's face, she added, bitterly, "Oh, you need not tell me. I can guess—money!"

Mrs. Dean sighed.

"My dear child, you must try and not judge him hastily. When I married him he had five thousand a year!"

"He has fourteen hundred now!" said Venetia. "About three times as much as he allows you. What does he do with it?"

"He speculates, I think."

"I believe he gambles," said Venetia, hotly, "or else why, when he writes for money, is he always in such a desperate hurry for it?"

Mrs. Dean declined to notice this speech, and Venetia went on.

"How much is it?"

"Fifty pounds, he says," went on the poor wife, hurriedly. "I shall have it back out of his Michaelmas rents."

"Of course you won't! Did he know you had paid Stubbs?"

"Yes, I told him!"

"Oh, dear! We have been living on cabbage and salt pork! Not one of the children has had a new frock all the summer, and now he comes down on you for fifty pounds. I should refuse flatly; but I am quite sure you will send it."

"My dear, I have not fifty pounds in the world! The Squire says I must raise it somehow, and so I am going into Morton this afternoon. Don't look alarmed, Venetia. I have not borrowed Mr. Carew's carriage. I would not for such an errand."

"Shall you borrow of the Clintons?"

"I dare not borrow money lest I might be unable to pay it. Your father says I am to dispose of some of the plate."

"Just like him! I suppose he expects us to eat with steel forks, and stir our tea with pewter spoons in future."

"It won't be so bad as that, dear! The spoons and forks need not go; but our day for dinner-parties is over. I think the candelabra and such-like things could be spared."

"Shall I go to Morton instead of you?"

"No, my dear," replied Mrs. Dean, kissing her, for she knew what the offer must have cost. "Stanway, the jeweller, knows me, and it will be better for me to go myself."

It was a scorching hot afternoon; and despite her objections to Mr. Carew Venetia would rather have seen her mother in his pony carriage than starting to walk five miles to Morton. But there was no vehicle for hire in the village, and the Squire's letter had been too urgent for his wife to delay.

"I will get a fly from the King's Arms to come home in," she said cheerfully to Venetia, as she started. "Don't wait tea for me, my dear!"

Venetia felt decidedly out of temper with herself, the Squire, and things in general. She took up a book which Mrs. Clinton had lent her, and sat down in the coolest spot she could find, to be discovered presently by Mr. Carew.

"I have come to borrow one of your little sisters, Miss Dacosta!" he said, pleasantly, "if your mother can spare one to play with Dolly!"

"Lily or Violet will be delighted!" said Venetia, stiffly. "Mother has gone out!"

"In this heat? I thought it was only a sunworshipper like myself who cared to walk in such weather!"

"Mother has gone to Morton. She started an hour ago."

"Not walking?"

"Yes. There are no flies to be hired here. She promised to come back in one from the King's Arms."

Mr. Carew looked indignant.

"I think you might have allowed her to use my phaeton. I know you hate me pretty thoroughly, Miss Dacosta; but to let your mother walk five miles in this heat rather

than allow me the pleasure of driving her seems absurd."

"It was mamma's own doing. She has gone into Morton on private business," said Venetia, hotly. "Besides, why should you always be doing things for us? We are not beggars, and we have no claim on you!"

"You are certainly not beggars, but your mother and the children have the strongest possible claim on me," replied Mr. Carew, gravely.

"I don't believe it!"

He bowed.

"I am aware you hold a very evil opinion of the Squire, your stepfather, but in his younger days he was very different from what he is now, and once—it was long ago—before ever you were born, he saved my life."

Venetia started.

"I never knew you had met the Squire!"

"I tell you it was long ago. I have not seen him for years and years, but the fact remains, I owe my life to him. He saved me from drowning when I was a child not bigger than Dolly. He sent me to school, and paid my bills ungrudgingly until I was old enough to shift for myself."

"It sounds wonderful! If he was so kind to you why didn't you go and see him when you came back to England?"

"Because we quarrelled years ago. Before ever I went abroad, he told me he wished never to see my face again. I am a proud man, Miss Dacosta, and I could not bring myself to seek the Squire of Ashley after that; but for the sake of the old days when he was so kind to me, I would fain do somewhat for his children. I cannot feel as a stranger to your mother and sisters when I remember that for years the Squire was like a father to me."

"Does mamma know?"

"I have told no one but you. I only spoke of the past because I know you have thought me presumptuous in seeking your mother's friendship. I believe you even grudge me the affection of your little sisters!"

"You were so rich," she said, simply, "and I thought you liked patronising us."

"I never dreamed of patronage. I only wanted to be friends for old time's sake."

"And did you know The Place as well as the Squire? Did you ever come to see him here? Why, you must have seen Kenneth, mother's stepson, who died just after her marriage?"

"I went to school with Ken. We were almost inseparable in those days. When the split came we went abroad together. He was like a second self to me."

"How you must have missed him when he died! Was it you who sent the news to the Squire?"

"I was at death's door myself then. No one ever expected me to recover. And now, Miss Dacosta, do you think, after this explanation, you will allow your family to be friendly with me?"

"You speak as though I ordered them about!"

"I believe you govern them completely. A very unhappy experience of men has made you a believer in women's rights, Miss Dacosta, and among those rights you count being head of the family!"

"I think women ought not to be trampled on!"

He smiled.

"I will promise not to trample on Mrs. Dean or any of her children if you will bury the hatchet, Miss Dacosta, and let us be friends."

"I will think about it," said Venetia, gravely; but when Mr. Carew had walked home in triumph, with Lily and Violet on either side, she fell to thinking of something very different.

What was the romance of his life? Was that beautiful pictured face in Dolly's nursery the portrait of his wife and the child's mother? Had he loved her very much, and

was it her loss that had brought that grave, almost sad, expression into his face?

"I daresay she was just a beauty, and nothing else," thought Venetia, bitterly. "Men like that always like weak, yielding women, with not an idea beyond their own homes. He never mentions her, and he has left off his mourning, but I believe his heart is buried in her grave. Well, at any rate, she had a happy life, poor girl. Any woman whom Mr. Carew loved would have that," and then Venetia roused herself from her day-dream, blushing crimson that a practical, strong-minded young person like herself had actually been idiotic enough to waste her thoughts on love!

CHAPTER V., AND THE LAST.

Mrs. Dean came back, weary and dispirited. Stanham, the jeweller, had been civility itself, but he had assured her he was quite unable to purchase such valuable articles as those she wished to dispose of, and that, though she would try to find someone willing to buy them, it would be weeks, perhaps months, before he found a customer.

"What are we to do?" she asked, sorrowfully. "Why, your father will be expecting the money to-morrow very likely."

Another time Venetia would have rejoiced at the Squire's discomfiture, but to-night her heart was softened by Carew's confidence. It had been her boast hitherto that her stepfather had never performed one unselfish action.

Now, at any rate, she knew he had once risked his life to save another's, Venetia felt she had misjudged him, and was ready to make amends.

"I suppose the things are really worth more than fifty pounds, mamma?"

"My dear, real silver will always fetch its weight at so much an ounce. If I could only go to London, and take the best of the plate with me, I could easily manage."

"You would not like to go. I could take care of the children."

"My dear, I have not been in London for ten years. If I went by myself I should be terrified."

"I will go if you like, mamma."

"You!" Mrs. Dean was amazed. "Why, Venetia, it would hurt you terribly to go on such an errand."

"No, it wouldn't," said Venetia, stolidly. "There is nothing mean or dishonest in selling what you no longer want. Mr. and Mrs. Arundel are in London now, and I am sure they would take me in for the night. I think, too, Mr. Arundel would tell me the best place to go to about the things."

"Venetia! Are you sure you don't mind?"

"I am quite willing to go," said the girl, slowly. "You will only worry yourself to death if nothing is done. I can telegraph to Mr. Arundel from Morton station, and then he will meet me at Charing Cross."

"And how will you get to Morton. I am sure Mr. Carew—"

"We need not trouble him," said Venetia. "I will send in a message by the postman to the King's Arms that we shall want a fly for the morning train. You had better pack up everything you want me to take in a strong wooden box; my own things will go in a hand-bag."

It was accident, of course, which made the first person Venetia encountered on Morton platform Mr. Carew, but, all the same, she was annoyed. She had undertaken the expedition out of pity for her mother. She had not wanted the master of Fern Cottage to know about it. If he was going up to town by the first quick train, why could he not have said so yesterday?

Carew was a man of the world. He betrayed not the least surprise at seeing Venetia.

"Are you going up to London, Miss Dacosta? You have a nice day, much cooler than it has been all the week."

"Yes," said Venetia, frigidly. "I am going up. My guardian will meet me at Charing Cross."

"And till then I hope you will accept my escort!" he said, pleasantly.

"No, I shan't. You are going first class. I always travel third."

Mr. Carew said nothing then, but after he had been to the booking-office he calmly held up for her inspection a third-class ticket.

"I hope now you will not decline my escort?"

"I can't forbid your riding where you please, but I think you are foolish."

"May I ask why?"

"You would have been much more comfortable first-class."

"I should have been much hotter. Now, Miss Dacosta, here comes the train. We are in luck's way; she is punctual to a minute."

There were very few passengers. The traffic from Morton was chiefly local, and this was the London fast train, not stopping again for thirty miles.

Mr. Carew handed Venetia to an empty carriage. No one followed them, so when the train started they had every chance of a prolonged *tête-à-tête*.

He did not attempt to question her as to her journey, or its object, but talked on indifferent subjects, till she suddenly said:

"You never told me yesterday you were going to London?"

"I did not make up my mind till after the evening post came in."

"The evening post does not often trouble us," said Venetia, frankly; "nothing comes by it except the Squire's letters, and they are like angel's visits, few and far between."

"Have you heard from him lately?"

"Mother had a letter from him the day before yesterday. He wrote from Homburg, and gave no hint of coming home."

"Ah!"

And incomprehensible though it seemed, Venetia really fancied that Mr. Carew was relieved by her reply.

"Do you return to-night, Miss Dacosta? I am hoping to catch the two o'clock train."

"Oh, no! I shall sleep in town. Your business can't be very important if it takes such a short time."

"I believe half-an-hour will settle it, but for all that, Miss Dacosta, it is important!"

"Why are we stopping here?" asked Venetia, suddenly. "There does not seem to be a station?"

As a fact, the engine-driver had pulled up, perceiving the signals were against him. Instead of shunting his train on to the siding, he let it remain on the rails, never suspecting that the express to the north had not passed.

Almost as Venetia spoke the express issued at full speed from the tunnel. There was a moment's panic. The driver of the up-train tried too late to steer on to the siding; the man in charge of the express to the north made a frantic effort to shut off steam, too late to save the accident, though no doubt it decreased the loss of life.

The trains collided, the rear half of the express and the last carriages of the up-train escaped uninjured; but between them lay a terrible *débris* of broken woodwork, of dead and suffering humanity.

To her life's end Venetia never forgot the horrors of that moment. With the fearful crash ringing in her ears she was thrown violently off her seat, and could barely distinguish Carew's voice.

"Keep perfectly still," he implored her; "it is our only chance."

The carriage had been overturned completely, the lamp was out. A weight of broken woodwork seemed to Venetia to be crushing the life out of her. All her limbs ached, and yet she was painfully, acutely sensitive to all that went on.

She could not see Carew. For a moment she feared he was dead, and she called his name. He responded faintly.

"Is this death?"

"I hope not! They will come as soon as they can get help. Keep up your courage."

"My head feels on fire," murmured Venetia. "Oh, Mr. Carew! if I never see mother again, give her my love!"

After boasted independence, her vaunted strength of mind, forsook her then. She leant on Carew for advice and comfort as helplessly as the weakest of her sex.

"If only I could move to help you," he said, anxiously; "but I am jammed down."

"They will come soon," she answered.

"This seems like a living death; and oh!—for her mind was beginning to wander with the pain and fright—"you'll tell mother we died friends."

It was ten minutes, though it seemed hours, before assistance came. Strong, willing arms literally dug away the *débris* of the carriage, and rescued those who had seemed to be entombed in a living grave.

One of Carew's arms was broken, and he was terribly bruised, but he had no vital injuries. With Venetia it was different. She lay quite motionless, and never opened her eyes when they called on her and tried to rouse her.

"Where are we?" asked Mr. Carew. "Not far from a station, I hope."

"Only a mile out of Belton," replied the doctor. "There is a very good hospital there."

"She must go to some quiet place where her mother can come and nurse her," said Carew, simply. "Don't think of expense. She is just the kind of nature to be miserable in a hospital."

The doctor suggested there was a trained nurse at Belton who sometimes received invalids.

Carew caught at the idea. Happily there had been but few passengers in the wrecked carriage; and, alas! to most of those their injuries had proved fatal.

He and Venetia were the only two sufficiently injured not to be able to return to their homes. Some half-dozen were bruised and shaken, and eight were beyond all human aid; that was the total.

Carew dictated a message to Paul Clinton. He felt instinctively he could not send the bad news straight to Mrs. Dean.

"Serious accident. Miss Dacosta much injured. Break it to her mother, and bring Mrs. Dean here."

Paul did not prove unworthy of the trust reposed in him. At four o'clock that afternoon he drove up to the nurse's house with Mrs. Dean in a fly.

Carew met them on the threshold.

"There is no change," he said, sadly. "But Dr. Jell does not give up hope, though he says she is in great danger."

It was a close fight with death. The September sun was pouring into the plain, bare-looking room at Nurse Guild's before Venetia was pronounced out of danger, and even then there lay weeks and months of an invalid's life before her. It would be long before she could walk again. She would never probably be the same strong, healthy girl she had been.

The tears poured slowly down her face.

"I had better have died."

"Don't say that," pleaded her sister Myrtle.

"We could not spare you, Sisie."

"I never did anything to make you love me," robbed Venetia. "I only ordered you about, and managed things."

Myrtle kissed her.

"Don't you know we would far rather have you weak and ailing than lose you? Oh! Venetia, you can't think how good everyone has been. Mrs. Clinton took all the children to Morton to stay with her except Lily, who has been at Fern Cottage with Dolly, and Mr. Carew has brought mother news of them every day."

Venetia's next question was a strange one.

"What became of the plate?" she asked, feebly. "Was it saved, and did mother get anyone else to sell it? How angry the Squire

would be if he has been kept waiting for the money all this time."

Myrtle looked troubled.

"Papa does not want the money now, Sisie; and please do not speak unkindly of him."

"Why? Has he been ill, too?"

"Mrs. Clinton is spending the day with mother," said Myrtle, trying hard to change the subject. "May she come and see you, Sisie?"

The lawyer's wife understood more of illness than little Myrtle. She saw that Venetia would worry herself terribly if she thought she was being deceived, and so she told her the truth.

The Squire was dead. He must have died the very day he wrote to his wife, and Mr. Carew—who had a friend at Homburg—received the news the evening before his journey to town. He went to London solely to find out if it was true before he broke the blow to Mrs. Dean.

Venetia drew a long breath.

"I'm glad I thought kindly of the Squire just once. But, Mrs. Clinton, what will become of mother?"

"My dear, that is all settled."

"She has only eighty pounds a year," fretted Venetia, "and Mr. Arundel won't let me help her. Of course Mr. King has taken possession of Ashley Place?"

"Not yet. It seems, Venetia, that though Mr. King's name is used, the real proprietor of Ashley is Mr. Carew."

"Oh!" Venetia drew a long breath. "Well, I don't think he will be hard on mother."

"My dear, have you ever heard of Kenneth Dean, the Squire's only son?"

"Yes. He died soon after mother married."

"He did not die. He had been given over by the doctors when the news was sent to his father, but almost by a miracle he rallied and recovered. He married an American heiress, and has since been known by her name."

"You need not go on," said Venetia, quietly. "It is Mr. Carew. He is Kenneth Dean—Dean of Ashley."

"Yes, and he is anxious to be a son to your mother."

"That explains why he always liked the children," said Venetia, "and hated me. Of course, they are his sisters. I am an alien."

"I do not think he hates you, Venetia."

A week later Venetia was well enough to be dressed and lie on a sofa. It was wheeled into the little parlour, and then Mrs. Dean suggested her daughter should see Kenneth.

Poor woman, she had had terrible anxiety. Only now, that Venetia knew all, had she suffered her children to wear mourning for their father, or donned her own weeds.

"I don't want to see him!"

"My dear. He is almost your brother."

"He isn't—and I hate shame!"

"So do I," said Kenneth, pleasantly, as he entered unannounced. "Mrs. Dean, I am used to nursing and sick people. Will you leave me alone with Venetia for a little talk?"

A dead silence followed her mother's departure; then Venetia broke out impatiently:

"Have they told you?"

"That you are out of danger? Yes, and I am delighted to hear it!"

"That I shall be nothing but a useless log for months, perhaps years? I shall never be of any use to anyone. Oh, I had better have died!"

"I don't think so."

"Oh, you don't understand! You have taken my place! Mother will lean on you. You will help her?"

"I shall try to. You know I am her stepson, and I owe her a great deal for all she has suffered of late."

"I understand now why they all took to you, and why you hated me. Of course, the children were your sisters."

"Of course, but I never hated you, Venetia, though I am thankful you are not my sister!"

"I made myself tolerably disagreeable; but I must have been worse than I thought if you feel thankful we are not related."

Kenneth Dean smiled.

"You have had to try depending on others lately, Venetia. Was it really such miserable work? Did the world seem worse because you could not manage it?"

"I think you are cruel."

"I want you to answer me. Venetia, when we both thought death was near, you were willing to be friends. You forgot your opinion that men always trampled on women. Then, in that moment, you turned to me for help and sympathy, and forsook your favourite creed of women's rights."

"I shall have to forsake it always, I am afraid. What good would a poor weak creature like me be to the cause? I shall be fit for nothing but home."

"And you will want someone to take care of you."

"You need not taunt me with it if I shall. Myrtle will be a nice little companion for me."

"Only she has promised to be Paul Clinton's companion instead! They settled matters while you were so ill, and as soon as you are better they will be married."

"Oh!"

"But, Venetia, I am seeking a companion. I want someone to love me, and be a mother to Dolly! If you will trust yourself to me, I swear that I will make you happy."

"But you hate me?"

"I have loved you always. I have hoped for months that you would be my wife. Venetia, can't you trust me not to trample on you, even though I am one of those old-fashioned people who don't believe in women's rights?"

"It is not that."

"Are you thinking of Dolly? I fancied you loved the child?"

"I love Dolly dearly. I was thinking of her mother."

He stroked the fair head caressingly as he answered:

"My Mary was one of the sweetest, gentlest creatures Heaven ever made. She loved me dearly, and I married her, poor child, because she had unwittingly betrayed her affection. I was very fond of her. I hope, I pray, I made her happy; but, Venetia, you need fear no rival, dead or living. It is the first love of my heart that I offer you."

"And you will promise," said Venetia, presently, when a very great many important things had been settled, "you will promise me faithfully that when we quarrel—"

"Have you made up your mind we shall quarrel?" he interrupted her to ask.

"The best people quarrel sometimes," she retorted. "Promise that you will never taunt me with having changed my mind."

"Never! And you on your part will promise not to accuse me of trampling on you?"

Her eyes met his with a smile. Suddenly he stooped, and kissed her. It meant that the great cause had lost one zealous adherent. Venetia Dacosta was content to acknowledge man's supremacy, since she had promised to marry the last of the Deans of Ashley!

[THE END.]

THE GIRL WHO LAUGHS.

The girl who laughs—God bless her,

Thrice blesses herself the while;

No music of earth

Has nobler worth

Than that which voices a smile.

The girl who laughs—life needs her;

There is never an hour so sad

But wakes and thrills

To the rippling trills

Of the laugh of a lass who's glad.

AN ESCAPE.—Willie: "Say, that boy sliding down hill with me this morning got run over and killed. I'm glad it wasn't me. Gee, what a lickin' I'd have got!"

Society

A NEW Royal decree which the King has made is that wherever he may be, and no matter what the time, he can obtain, if he so wishes, a mounted escort at only twenty minutes' notice. This was brought about by the fact that on one occasion he went to the barracks to request a mounted escort as soon as possible, and it was found that there was only one officer in sole possession of the building.

THE King is very punctilious about all matters connected with Court etiquette, even in the matter of Court dress, and not long ago when a statesman was suddenly summoned he noticed at once that he was wearing his collar, and asked him why he did so. It was deferentially pointed out to him that it was "collar" day, which well accounted for the fact. But His Majesty's displeasure was only diverted, not appeased. "Then I am very badly served," he replied, and, turning, looked severely at the person responsible for these niceties of his attire.

VIOLET culture, as a trade, is becoming a pet hobby among the aristocracy. One of the latest to take up this method of money-making is Lady Aileen Wyndham-Quin, and, like her sister, Lady Rachel Fitz-Gerald, who died last year, she is a famous violet farmer, and has acres of almost every known variety in cultivation at Adare Manor, Co. Limerick. She sells rooted plants at very low figures, and carries out her ideas in a very businesslike manner. Mrs. Coghill is another noted "farmer," and the first to start this industry in the Emerald Isle.

THE Earl of Carnarvon is one of the lucky few who possess robes that have been used at former Coronations and which are still in perfect condition. It is not only peers and peeresses that will have to wear robes at the Coronation, but K.C.B.'s and K.C.M.G.'s, and some members of great public bodies, who have a right to be present. This has caused much dismay among them, as the regulation dress will cost from sixty to one hundred pounds.

THE young Earl of Clonmell, who, with a damaged arm in a sling, jumped, the other day, from a buggy to save himself when his horse had bolted, comes of a family which has of late years experienced in many ways an extraordinary amount of ill fortune. His father, formerly in the Scots Guards, fell from a drag and sustained most serious injuries, which eventually brought on paralysis and his death in the prime of life. His next brother also met with an accident which afflicted him mentally and physically, and brought him prematurely to the grave. Lord Clonmell last year visited New York, but only to catch a fever and lie hovering betwixt life and death in a hotel. He married a few months after his recovery.

ITALIANS never weary of telling anecdotes of the kind-hearted and accomplished Queen Margherita, the "Pearl of Savoy," as they delight to call her. The Queen's love of the arts and artists is well known, and to her help and sympathy many leading artists owe their present positions. It was Queen Margherita who, recognising the musical genius of Puccini, paid all the expenses of his musical education at Milan. The painter Farrotto was a special protégé of Her Majesty, and to be a man of letters or an adept with the brush or the chisel was a passport to her favour.

HERE is a pretty story from Dublin: The presence of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught and their son and daughter, in addition to the Viceroy and Lady Cadogan, at a recent Drawing-Room, necessitated six courtesies being made by every lady who passed through the Throne Room. An A.D.C. stationed at the door reminded them of their duty: "Six courtesies, please madame." One very nervous debutante, who evidently had no idea what the order meant, on reaching the Viceroy

"bobbed" all six to him, till everyone thought she was never going to stop, and then hurried from the room, taking not the smallest notice either of Royalty or of Lady Cadogan.

THE Grand Duke of Baden, who recently celebrated his jubilee of rule, may be called the Nestor of German sovereigns—an honour which he at least shares with the King of Saxony. It was to those two wise princes that the Emperor Frederick on his death-bed confided the especial care of his son and successor, the present Kaiser; and before that the Grand Duke had said to his brother-in-law as he succeeded to the Throne—only to reign for ninety-nine days: "Thou canst not reign without Bismarck." Curiously enough, the Grand Duke of Baden bore such a strong resemblance to his brother-in-law of Prussia that they looked like doubles of one another, and their mutual attachment was of the most devoted kind.

Gems

LET us be content to work. To do the thing we can, and not presume to fret because it is little.

To be able to use the tongue fluently is undoubtedly a great advantage in many cases; but the power to keep silence is equally advantageous.

THE true democratic idea is, not that every man shall be on a level with every other man, but that every man shall be what God made him without let or hindrance.

LET it be our happiness this day to add to the happiness of those around us, to comfort some sorrow, to relieve some want, to add some strength to our neighbour's virtue.

IT is good for every man and woman to choose times for quiet meditation for reviewing his or her experience and ascertaining wherein improvement may be made upon his or her record.

CHEERFULNESS AT THE TABLE

AN old lady, who looked as though she might have belonged to the "Sunshine Society" all her life, was asked by a friend the secret of her never-failing cheerfulness. Her answer contains a suggestive lesson for parents. "I think," said the clever old lady, "it is because we were taught in our family to be cheerful at the table. My father was a lawyer with a large criminal practice. His mind was harassed with difficult problems all the day long, yet he always came to the table with a smile and a pleasant greeting for everyone, and exerted himself to make the table-hour delightful. All his powers to charm were freely given to entertain his family. Three times a day we felt this genial influence, and the effect was marvellous. If a child came to the table with cross looks, he or she was quietly sent away to find a good boy or girl, for only such were allowed to come within that loving circle. We were taught that all petty grievances and jealousies must be forgotten when mealtime came, and the habit of being cheerful three times a day, under all circumstances, had its effect on even the most sullen temper. Grateful as I am for all the training received in my childhood home, I look back upon the table influence as among the best of my life."

Much is said and written these days about "table manners." Children (in well-bred families) are drilled in a knowledge of "good form," as to the use of the fork and napkin; proper methods of eating the various courses are decanted upon; but training in the most important grace or habit a child should have, that of cheerfulness at the table, is too often neglected.

The Orientals had no family ties of affection until they began to eat at a common table. Let the gathering at mealtime, fathers and mothers, make the most happy hour of the day, and the influence on the children may be beyond estimation.

Gleanings

THE normal woman is capable of one love and fifty affairs.

A PLAIN woman takes pride in her friends, a beautiful woman in her enemies.

THE WORLD'S LARGEST EGGS.—The egg of the *Aepyornis Maximus* is the largest in existence, one having been known to contain two gallons of water, or equal to 135 hen's eggs. The bird has long since died out, but it remains in the shape of a few bones which have been found in Madagascar.

ALFONSO'S CORONATION.—Madrid is busy preparing for the Coronation of the young King, Alfonso XIII., which is expected to be a very brilliant function. The English Court may be represented by the Prince of Wales, the German Emperor by Prince Albert of Prussia, the Czar by the Grand Duke Alexis, the King of Italy by the Duke and Duchess of Aosta, the King of Sweden by the Crown Prince, and the venerable King of Denmark by his grandson, Prince Christian.

THE JAP AND THE "FREE WHEEL."—A new reading has been given to the term "free wheel" in Japan. According to the *Kobe Chronicle*, a young gentleman was brought up at the Ku Sabansho the other day charged with stealing a bicycle. Asked why he had done the thing, he said he was a student of English, and seeing the bicycle standing idle near a doorway an English friend told him it was a free wheel, whereupon he had taken it out to ride, when a policeman interfered and deprived both himself and the wheel of their freedom. "The English," as he told the judge, "is an atrocious language."

SPREAD OF GAMBLING AMONG WOMEN.—Ladies in fashionable society are losing thousands of pounds at the fascinating game of bridge. Girls gamble before they arrive at what are called years of discretion, and married women squander their husbands' money as well as their own. A "society" paper has mentioned the case of a lady who lost £80,000 in one night at bridge, and other losses brought up the total to more than £200,000, which her husband paid. Gambling, says the paper, has become a fine art among women; it is the newest excitement. Every other night at country houses fortunes are lost and won at cards.

THE ANCHOR OF NELSON'S FLAGSHIP.—After having been embedded in the sand for five years, the anchor of Nelson's ill-fated flagship, the *Poudroyant*, which was wrecked at Blackpool in 1897, has been raised and taken ashore. The anchor lay right in the channel, and was a constant danger to pleasure boats. Nothing could be done, however, as it was the property of the company which purchased the wreck. A few weeks ago the company abandoned their claim, and the North Pier Company, by means of a tug-boat and a powerful crane, buoyed the anchor up and dragged it ashore, where it now lies, a source of interest to visitors.

CANADIAN FUNERALS.—Our Canadian friends' mode of procedure in the disposal of their dead in Toronto is novel to British ideas. When a member of a family dies, notice is given to the undertaker, who, if it is a young person that has died, places a large rosette of white ribbon on the knocker of the door, or, in the case of an adult, one of black ribbon, which denotes to passers-by that a death has taken place in the house. From the date of death to the funeral the front door is kept open, and anyone who chooses can enter and view the corpse. The burial takes place two days after the death. When deaths occur in the winter months, when the temperature is seven or eight degrees below zero, it is impossible to dig graves, and in that case the remains are deposited in vaults in the cemetery, for which a fee of three or four dollars a month is charged until the spring, when the frost gives, and it is then possible for the grave to be dug.

PING-PONG THE LEVELLER.—Ping-Pong is evidently a great social leveller. The vice-president of one of the great trusts was recently ignominiously beaten by his own office boy. They have taken a craze very badly in New York when they allow it to interfere with social distinctions.

THE MATERIAL MADE THE MAN.—In olden days it was not by the pattern of the cloak he wore, but by the splendour of the material of which it was made, that the rank of a man was indicated. Women of high degree were also given sumptuous wraps of the same kind to blazon forth their great estate.

PREVENTING THE RIFLE'S KICK.—Two artificers in the Budapest arsenal have perfected an arrangement for obviating the recoil or kick of a rifle. The contrivance consists of springs in the butt of the weapon, which are acted upon by compressed air. A series of experiments have been carried out with the new invention, which is said to work admirably, and the matter is now in the hands of the military authorities.

MUZZLING PILLAR-BOX THIEVES.—Experiments are being made in this country and in France with a view to preventing thieves extracting letters from pillar-boxes. The British invention is that of Mr. W. Crossley, and consists of a wire arrangement inside the pillar-box. The weight of the letters carries them through the cage, but they cannot be pulled up by a piece of string and something sticky, the usual means adopted by the letter thief. In the French invention steel teeth are placed close by the mouth of the box.

FROM WAIF TO CENTENARIAN.—The death is announced of Ernestine Franke, the oldest woman in Berlin. She was a "Findelkind," having been found as a five-year-old infant upon the border of a wood. She was wrapped in linen, and round her neck was tied a card inscribed with the date of her birth—January 15, 1800. She was brought up by the Frankes, people of the working-class order, who gave her their name and supported her till she was able to go to service in Berlin, where she lived for the remainder of her life.

THE CORONATION FLOWER.—There seems to be a determination on the part of florists to make the lily of the valley the Coronation flower. Whole fields of lilies have been laid out in Kent. Large quantities will also come from the South of France, and the fields there are all contracted for before the flowers appear above the ground. It is difficult to see how the idea of the lily of the valley as a Coronation flower arose. Surely roses are more English, and as they will be plentiful in June, one would imagine that their popularity would be assured.

COAXING NATURE.—A number of prominent Japanese scientists are at present engaged upon a series of experiments for the artificial production of rain by means of electricity. The first trial was made in the Fukushima prefecture, and the results obtained were very satisfactory. Operations were commenced at eleven in the evening, but no change was noted until nine the next morning, when clouds began to gather in the vicinity of the place where the experiments were being held. Rain soon began to fall over an area of several miles in extent, and continued without intermission for twelve hours.

EUROPEANISING JAPAN.—It will be interesting to see whether Japan is sufficiently Europeanised to celebrate the jubilee of the Emperor, which occurs this year, Mutsuhito having been born in November, 1852. By native calculation, of course, his Majesty was fifty last year, for the Japanese are in the habit of adding a year to the actual age. Also fifty has, or rather had, no special significance in the Japanese outlook. The European calendar was introduced into the country as long ago as 1873, and its influence has affected many departments of life. It may even in time lead to Japanese silver and golden weddings.

A WOMAN'S charity sometimes begins away from home, and then remains there.

A WOMAN will often say no when she means yes; but never yes when she means no.

THE BIRDS SUFFER.—Dire results on bird life have attended the demand for feathers and bird-skins for the decoration of hats. This is especially so in France, where the craving for wing feathers has resulted in the total extinction of swallows, kingfishers, and goldfinches. They have all been exterminated or hunted into other countries.

PAT'S TEST.—A good story is told of an Irishman, more patriotic than clever, who enlisted in one of the smart cavalry regiments. The fencing instructor had experienced rather a difficult job in the matter of explaining to him the various ways of using the sword. "Now," he said, "how would you use the sword if your opponent feinted?" "Bedad," said Pat, with gleaming eyes, "I'd just tickle him with the point to see if he was shamming."

HARNESSING A CATARACT.—The waterfall on the River Eden, near Kirkby Stephen Station, Westmorland, is to be put in harness by the North-Eastern Railway Company to provide electric light for the station premises. The torrent will drive a turbine and dynamo, and the electric current will be conveyed to the station to supply light to the offices, locomotive workshops, and signal-cabins. An electric luggage lift will be provided, and the machinery in the workshops will be driven by electricity.

THE ZOO'S INFANTS.—There is some interesting info life at the Zoological Gardens just now, including, among that which first saw the light at Regent's Park, a wild bull calf and a couple of pigs of a rare breed. But these new arrivals have not dimmed the popularity of the two little lion cubs which arrived in March, after a voyage all the way from Uganda, and are even yet no bigger than collie pups. The young wild horses do not seem to have borne the change of climate very well, and are anything but wild.

STILL AT LARGE!—A hairdresser of Melbourne—in the twentieth century—receives a customer before one o'clock in the afternoon and proceeds to shave or crop him. The work is not finished at one sharp. Possibly one side of his face is shaved or one side of his hair cut. The barber completes the work, and exceeds the limit of "one o'clock in the afternoon." He is prosecuted! This is all duly explained by the hairdresser, but the magistrate fines the hairdresser ten shillings, with twenty-seven and sixpence costs! And the policeman and the magistrate are still at large.

A TRAMP HOTEL.—There is now opened and occupied in the city of Philadelphia a new tramp hotel, or, as it is called by its projectors, a "Wayfarers' Lodge." The building will have four floors, the offices and reading-room being located on the first; sleeping-rooms, baths, and dining-room on the second and third, while the fourth floor will be devoted to the emergency cases of homeless women. The tramp who applies for board will first register at the office, and then pass out into the wood-yard in the rear, where he will be given light or heavy work, according to his physical ability.

NO WORK NO LODGING.—A day's board and lodging may be earned at the "hotel" in from three to four hours, and during the remainder of the day the tramp will be free to seek permanent work elsewhere, but no lodging can be secured without work. The wood prepared by the tramps will be sold to the public at trade rates, thus partially defraying the expenses of the institution. At night, after exchanging his clothes for a clean night-robe and taking a bath (which will be compulsory), the tramp will retire to a clean and well-ventilated chamber for the night. The cuisine of the hotel will be wholesome, and beef soup, beans, barley, etc., will constitute the diet. The hotel will accommodate 208 tramps.

THE EYES OF THE PICTURE

By the Author of "For Silk Attire," etc., etc.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Violet Marsden, stung to the quick by the neglect of the man who calls himself her husband, and driven to desperation by his callous and inhuman treatment of her, in a fit of temporary madness would have made an end of her life by drowning. From such a death she was happily saved by a young man who was passing along the Embankment at the moment. Seven years have gone by, and Violet Marsden, now known as Mrs. Herbert, has almost forgotten this unhappy episode. She is quite a favourite among certain artists, and at one of her "At Homes," Leigh Erlscourt is introduced to her. Mrs. Herbert recognises him as her preserver, and would like to tell him how she has blessed him a thousand times since that day. Leigh sees Mrs. Herbert frequently, and his friends and relations are curious of his interest in a woman whose past is shrouded in mystery. Mrs. Herbert visits Leigh's studio to look at a picture he is painting. It is that of the woman who would have destroyed herself but for his timely aid, and it is with difficulty Mrs. Herbert controls herself at this critical moment. Mrs. Chalon, who is the soul of propriety, hears of her brother's infatuation for this "unknown woman," and earnestly remonstrates with him on his folly, but all to no purpose. Leigh does not realise it yet but he has met his fate, and if it is folly he must pay the price.

CHAPTER XV.

IT was Erlscourt's intention to go into Wales as soon as he could spare the time, which would not be just yet. The delay was not of very great moment, as it was hardly likely that he would be able to discover anything there, having no knowledge of the place or even the direction where it lay. Seeing Violet the day after his taking Dora to the Prince's Theatre, he got from her further particulars than either had been able to think about previously.

"What I mean to do at once," he said, "is to try and trace Marsden from this house in Blackfriars. I want the street and number; any particulars you can think of that would help me to identify him to others, and, of course, a description or photograph, if you have one. If it were he I saw in the Haymarket the night I was there, I did not see him enough to give a description."

"I have none," she said. "I can give you a description as he was seven years ago, but not only may he have changed, but he might be disguised."

"Never mind that; of course in that case the task will be more difficult."

Violet gave him a minute description, recalling traits and habits which would be of use as a means of identification, doing it with manifest repugnance, but answering clearly and readily his close cross-questioning. It all brought back the past so vividly—the past that seemed doubly sordid and stained by contrast with the present, as if that and this were different worlds, and different beings lived in them.

It seemed so useless, too. How trace a man who in these seven years had probably gone through twice that number of aliases? She said as much.

"I know," Erlscourt answered, "it is the slenderest chance; but I must not leave anything undone. Now the address, Violet."

She went to her davenport for pencil and paper, pausing when a few steps away, and looking back in the faint hope that he would see her hesitation and yield to it. Her hand shook as she wrote the name of the mean street, her cheek burned and her eyes sank as she gave him the paper. He took it without a word, without any change of face that she could see.

"Don't go," she ventured to say, "I can't bear for you to come face to face with all that squalor, that degradation, and your work that must not be stopped. Oh, if you would let it alone!"

"Violet," said Erlscourt, looking down into the troubled young face, "you cannot mis-

judge me, or even misunderstand me. All you have borne only makes you the dearer, and my powerlessness the more intolerable. No outward degradation can touch you. All that belongs—well, I have sullied my lips and your ears enough with the name, and I cannot say it again. Good-bye, dearest."

And yet, though he would not utter one word of all that had surged in his heart at the sight of that address, she knew it, and he knew she did as well as if he had spoken.

He scarcely saw the way before him the first few paces after he left her house, and the storm only gathered force while he worked alone the rest of the day. If Edgar Marsden had stood before him then in bodily presence, he knew he should have hurled aside every earthly consideration, every thought of consequences, and struck him dead at his feet. Let come what might then, the vengeance would have been wrought.

The feeling only deepened when late in the evening he turned out of Ludgate Circus down the Blackfriars Road, and, crossing it, left further and further behind him all life that is worth the living. He had been in such places often before, wandered into the lowest haunts in Continental and Eastern cities; but they had never struck him with the sickening repulsion this street in Blackfriars did. Violet lived here! Violet, with her refinement, her gentle breeding, her purity of nature. His Violet, whom he would surround with all fair and sweet things. Could it be the right place? It seemed impossible to imagine her here.

A narrow, dingy street, where many houses preferred paper to glass, where doors stood open in the summer evening showing dirty passages within—a little shop here, a public-house over the way—about him low types of face, even in the children who sprawled almost under his feet.

He felt as if the thick, hot air must choke him.

His heart sank at every step, dreading to find the house he sought worse than those he had passed.

Of course, he attracted notice, although it was dark, and he had taken care to adopt as much disguise as could be produced by a wrap coat and a wide-brimmed felt hat he had been used to wear in Italy.

But no disguise he could have worn could have hidden a carriage and walk not much seen in Penfold Rents; nor could he hide a quality of voice also rare in that district, when he found it necessary to address a lady taking the air on her doorstep.

Seven years having passed since there had been a number on many of the houses, it followed that those houses were difficult to find. And No. 18 was amongst them.

"Eighteen, sir!" said the dame in question, giving the title instinctively. "That there 'ouse over there is eighteen, but it ain't 'ad no number on it for a good time."

Erlscourt thanked her, and crossed to No. 18.

Here a curly-haired child screamed out,—"Mother, here's a gentleman wants yer!"

But when the landlady appeared Erlscourt received a check at once. When he asked if a Mr. Marsden had lived here, as he wanted him on business, she shook her head and looked puzzled.

"I think he lodged here about seven years ago," explained Erlscourt.

"Lor, sir, I ain't been 'ere but six months," said she, rather amused at the idea of such a long sojourn as seven years. "I don't know anyone in the street as 'ud know—leastways, they might at the shop round the corner."

The "shop round the corner" proved to be a pawnbroker's.

The master was slightly above the surrounding inhabitants, but that was no gain, for though he had been there for eight years he couldn't recall either the name or recognise a description.

"No; he didn't know no such person."

Erlscourt forced himself to say that the Mr. Marsden he wanted had a young wife—a girl with fair hair, brown-eyed.

It seemed to him sacrilege to even mention Violet there, and in connection with the man who had been her curer.

And he might have spared himself, for the pawnbroker "Never hadn't seen no such a gal!" a speech which so jarred on the visitor that he was glad to get out of the shop.

The police-station was not to be thought of. There was no knowing what a man of Marsden's stamp might have done that would make the police as eager to be on his track as Erlscourt was.

The owner of No. 15, he found from the landlady of the public-house, was a public body.

The house was, of course, sublet as deeply as it could be, and the man who had leased it in the first place, seven years ago, was now dead.

"You see, sir," the landlady said, "it ain't possible to find out people who's lived here less time than a month ago. They flit no end. If this gentleman was a friend o' yours"—a friend! Erlscourt winced—"I'm afeard you won't track him from this 'ere place."

"I'm afraid not," said the painter; and leaving Penfold Rents came out again into the ceaseless stream that flows over Blackfriars Bridge seemingly at almost all hours.

There lay the river, broad and dark; there flashed the lights all up its banks; far off the stately towers of Westminster, as if they closed in the river. Erlscourt crossed the road and leant over the bridge, unheeding the crowds sweeping on behind him, not one of whom, perhaps, hard and barren though their lives might be, carried a heavier heart than he.

Yet the glamour of the night, heightening into beauty the scene before him, had its power too over this restless, questioning, tempted heart, till a sudden wave of memory rushed over him, and he turned away, not down the Embankment, he could not pass there to-night, but into Fleet Street, whose noisy, throbbing life was calmed down at this hour.

He saw now as he had not seen before what his vow was to cost him, what temptation would dog him at every step, not alone the palpable temptation belonging to the very position between Violet and himself, but a more subtle temptation.

What if he came to seek the truth less for her sake than his own, less to prove her honour unsold than to prove her free for him to win?

That would be to him a stain, and yet how hard to detect the falling away until it had come to pass. Yet, although he saw all the dangers, he did not shrink from the task, nor regret that he had undertaken it, for the briefest second.

When the light was fading the next evening, he put aside work and left the house, intending to go and tell Violet what he had been attempting.

As he came into the park from the Gardens he saw her herself walking slowly before him. To overtake her was the work of a minute. She looked up as the light step came close to her, evidently recognising it, turned and stopped with a flush of pleasure.

"I was coming to you," Erlscourt said, still holding her hand, there was no one near. "Are you tired?"

"No. I came out because the evening was fine, and it tempted me. Why do you ask?"

"Turn back with me under the trees and I will tell you what I have done, or, rather, not done."

She turned back silently, and when they had



"VIOLET, WHAT DO YOU MEAN? ARE YOU GOING TO BANISH ME?" SAID ERLSCOURT.

gained that belt of trees bordering the Long Water, Erlscourt said:

"I went to Blackfriars, Violet, and failed."

"I knew you would," she said; but she drew in her breath a little.

"Will you hear details?" Erlscourt asked, gently.

"No." There was an involuntary shiver. "I know you tried your utmost; what do the details matter?"

"I have not quite given up that point, though. Did you tell me the name of the village where your school was?"

"It was in Melton, in Herefordshire. What are you going to do?" she asked anxiously. "It will be only waste of time to go to Wales."

"I shall go, nevertheless, when I am a little more free. After all, there is a certain radius within which the place we want must be; and there would be the church register. Remember churches in Wales are not as numerous as in England."

Violet was silent. She knew the uselessness of objection. Presently she said, abruptly:

"Well, let that be. Talk of something else. I want to hear about the Bond Street Exhibition. Are you ready for it?"

"I am going to send my pictures off next week. You know, it is not confined to my doings, though."

"I know; I shall come and see them."

"Why, yes, of course," said Erlscourt. "I must have your verdict, though you have seen some of them. Why are you turning?" for she had made as if to retrace her steps.

"I ought to be going; it is getting late," she said.

"Ah, stay a little longer," said Erlscourt, in his softest tone. "How often do I see you, and alone? I thought I should see you to-night in a room full of people, and perhaps five minutes alone afterwards. I never looked for this happiness."

She yielded, as any woman must, for she was happy too, dark though the present was, and the future she dared not look at. But for the time, to be at his side, her hand in his, to hear his voice, to feel all around her the atmosphere of love and reverence, to be cherished, was infinitely satisfying and soothing to her who, in her bitterness of soul, had almost learned to look on herself as cast out from womanhood.

She let the time slip by, listening rather than talking herself, while they paced slowly under the trees. The solemnity of night had fallen, the air was hushed, the leaves motionless, only the twitter of a bird now and then; the distant voices, the thousand noises of the great city, hardly heard.

"Oh," Violet said, breaking a long pause, "what people miss who never see the night! How lovely it is—how ineffably peaceful!"

"And yet you end it," said Erlscourt, as she moved to go. "Are there too many moments like this in any life that they need be broken off? Must you go?"

"Don't tempt me," said Violet; "I ought to go."

"I will not gainsay you, love; but," he added, as they went on, "when shall I see you again?"

"I don't know."

Something in the tone, in the half-averted face, sent a chill through him. He bent down.

"Violet, what do you mean? Are you going to banish me—to tell me at least I must see you less often?"

"It would be better—wiser," said Violet, indistinctly.

He knew that, but the wisdom of the course only made it more intolerable.

"Perhaps," he said; "but I can't have it so. Don't make it so terribly hard, Violet."

"I am hard on myself," she whispered. "It is best."

Erlscourt was silent, biting his lip. To a

woman whose past had not a suspicion of blame he could have raised a thousand pleas; but to her—how could he press on her what might make the relations between them more strained and dangerous?

"It is all we have," he said, at last; "all we may ever have."

She did not say a word; her strength against him always lay in her weakness, and perhaps she instinctively felt that she had known so little love that to love she could only oppose a passive resistance, and the pain of even that resistance dimmed her eyes with tears.

"But what restrictions?" Erlscourt said. "How often? I cannot live so, Violet. If you can bear it, I cannot!"

She lifted her large brown eyes, softened and glittering with those unshed tears, a look so unconsciously eloquent that it went to his heart with a pang of shame and remorse.

"Oh, Violet," he said, "what am I worth after all? It is not harder for me than for you. What you can bear, cannot I? Have I brought these tears, my darling? Heaven forgive me! I thought never to make you shed one!"

"It is not your fault. I am foolish, I cannot stand anything," said Violet, brokenly, "at least, not from you."

Instead of taking advantage of that confession he answered,—

"The less need I have tried you then. I will not do it again. But I can't set the limits of my obedience; you must do that."

She met the brighter look and tone with a smile.

"Oh, no, I trust that to you."

Which answer touched him enough to make him silent for some little way.

"I trust you," on such a point, too, where all his nature and his passionate love for her would have led him the other way.

If Violet had used the words by design she could not have chosen a more perfect method

of binding him to her will; but she had not spoken by design. The words had been the spontaneous expression of her boundless faith, and he felt he could have died sooner than betray that faith.

But as usual, the woman suffered the most, not because the man loved less, but because he was on his honour, and for the time all things seemed possible to him, but the woman, who was not on her honour, who had banished him, wept bitter tears at her own fiat.

CHAPTER XVI.

The exhibition of Leigh Erlscourt's pictures was opened, and all the world flocked to see them, led thereto by the artist's rising fame and the enthusiastic praises of all the papers, not one of which failed to notice the picture called "Forsaken." It had been with some reluctance that Erlscourt had let that go for exhibition, but the arrangements had been made before Violet Herbert saw it, and he could not draw back. But he absolutely refused to sell it, declining two good offers that were made on the first day it was seen in public. Greville remonstrated vigorously. It was folly, he said; all very well for a wealthy man of assured position, but for a man struggling upwards, to refuse so much money, and perhaps offend influential people; poor Greville more nearly lost patience with Leigh than he had ever done in his life before. But it was such a generous anger that Leigh could not be vexed. He only wished that for the moment Greville had been a woman.

"It's always the way," concluded Greville. "The people who don't care for them always get the chances. But you know, old fellow, though you are a genius, genius won't carry the world by storm. It never has. You'll wake to-morrow with heaps of enemies all jealous of you. Artists are a confoundedly jealous lot, who'll just slip into the good graces of these rich buyers you are flouting."

"I'm sure I don't mind," said Erlscourt, with, it must be confessed, a rather aggravating laziness. "I wish you were Dora."

"Why?"

"Because she would know that I had a good reason for what you call my folly."

This remark did not mollify Greville, who was inclined to be a little sore on his friend's privileged relations with Dora. Being so sore he was of course rather wrong-headed, and chose to imagine that Leigh was thinking of some special rapport between himself and Dora. Erlscourt saw how he might be misinterpreted the minute he had spoken, and added,—

"Women are so quick, they spare one a lot of explanation."

"Well, I'm not a woman," growled Greville.

"No," said the other, so quickly that Greville's sense of the ridiculous was touched, and he burst out laughing.

"Well, go your own way, Leigh; I can't quarrel with you, but I can't make you out."

Which was exactly what Erlscourt wished. He was conscious in what light his real reason would appear to Greville, who would think as nine sensible people out of ten would, that Erlscourt was anything but sensible.

Escaping congratulations and praise, Erlscourt left London for the far off Herefordshire village. He spent ten days in visiting all the churches he could find within a certain radius, being ostensibly on a sketching expedition; but his search was so fruitless that he was forced to think he had either missed the particular church or that the marriage, even if legal, had not been inserted in the register. Nowhere could he find either a trace of the marriage in a cottage room.

Baffled, he came back to London. He had not the time, he decided, for such search. He considered the advisability of doing what Violet had shrunk from—employing a detective to assist him. It was all very well for her, alone and unprotected, to fear putting on her track a man like Edgar Marsden; but now the case was changed. Marsden would have to reckon

with himself (Erlscourt). Another question, and one which is sure to crop up in all cases, was the monetary one.

Violet would never endure that he should pay a sixpence towards the large expenses of a detective, and her own means did not suffice to defray it. So, uncertain, not seeing his way clearly, the painter came home, to find scores of invitations, for which he had little heart, and several commissions.

There was no doubt about accepting these last, and the invitations had also to be accepted as far as he had time. No man gets on without friends, he was very well aware. But he made time for a hurried visit to Vane Street—a letter would not do, it was not right. He did not suggest a detective, he simply told Violet, he had not yet settled on any plan. She, seeing he was harassed, put the subject aside when she had heard all he had to say, and for the short time he was with her, talked brightly of other matters. She had been to see his pictures, and she discussed them, and through all was so plainly proud of his success, so rejoicing in his triumph.

It was worth all the praise of the world. A note from Dora, slipped, scrawled, and imperative, awaited him when he got home.

"You've got an invitation to the Denby's dance," she wrote, "and you are to accept it. I've got the loveliest new dress, that I know you'll admire, and I've kept some dances for you."

He laughed.

"What a little autocrat! That was one of the very places I had meant not to go to. Emmie's friends are apt to be dull, but I suppose Mantor won't like it if I don't go, and, besides, I must obey Dora."

So he went; he thought of it afterwards, how curiously the great events of our lives hang on trivialities; how nearly he had been refusing this invitation.

The Danbys were rich people. Danby père was a brother barrister of Arthur Challoner's in big parliamentary practice. Mrs. Danby had been the daughter of a wealthy solicitor, and had brought plenty of money with her when she left her maiden home.

She was delighted to see the painter enter her rooms. She liked somebodies, and he promised to be a somebody. She administered a slight scolding for being late, however, and then accepted graciously his apologies.

"I daresay you had plenty to do, just coming back to town," she said, and then Erlscourt said he saw her daughter sitting down, and he was going to try his chance with her.

He did not see Dora till later in the evening; she gave him a nod as she swept past him, and said to her partner, who for the second time, was Greville, "Leigh didn't dare disobey me, he's here. Oh, I'm tired; let's sit out this dance."

Nothing loth, Greville dexterously piloted her out of the maze, and away into the next room, which was used for promenading.

"You'll be cooler here," he said, placing her in a fauteuil, and himself beside her.

"Yes," said Dora, fanning herself.

There ensued a little pause. There were a few other couples sitting down or walking about, not enough to spoil semi-privacy. Dora probably found the position and the silence slightly embarrassing, for she said:

"I shall have to go back presently. I kept some dances for Leigh."

"Is that why you will only promise me three?"

"Three is a very good number. I made him come, you know."

"Well, if he wants you he can come and look for you," said Greville. "Tell me now if I am to see so little of you as I have lately."

"I don't know—I can't help it. I suppose we go to different places," said Dora.

"We have been at the same places, and somehow there is always someone with you. If I speak to you for a minute Mrs. Challoner is sure to call you away, or to send me for something. You ought to give me a fourth dance to console me."

"Four dances! oh, I can't."

But with a pleading look in his face he had taken her card. Dora put her little gloved hand on his.

"Please let me have it," she said.

How could she expect him to give it up while she kept her hand on his, while she looked at him with that half-shy glance that would entreat more, if it dared?

"Just one," he said, putting "M. G." against a waltz; "so little to you, so much to me."

Her colour rose, her hand fell.

"Am I too bold?" Greville whispered.

"No," said the girl, with her pretty face rippling into a smile; and there is no knowing what more he might have said had not a shadow crossed them, and a tall man bowed as he passed and said, "How do, Greville?" bestowing a somewhat bold look on Dora.

"Who is he?" she said.

"His name is Venner. I know him slightly. The dance is over—the room is filling," said Greville.

"And here comes Leigh," exclaimed Dora, springing up.

"My dear Dora," said Erlscourt, taking the girl's hand, with a quick glance from one to the other. "Greville, I've seen you once already to-day. I won't rob you. I'll come later for my dances, Dora."

"You got my note?" said she; "I was so afraid you would not come."

"So you bribed me with dances and the sight of some wonderful robe?"

"Do you like it?" said she.

She was quite ignorant how she was hurting poor Greville, who stood by, and thought that she had not said a word to him about her dress, and that she need not have sent that note to Leigh to make him come, and be so glad when she saw him.

Had she anything to do with that nonsense about the picture? She had praised it; it was her favourite. The unbidden conjecture rushed into his mind, and yet he hated himself for it.

"There's that horrid creature again!" said Dora, suddenly.

She was standing nearest to Erlscourt; she put her hand on his arm, and Greville, seeing the action, in a sort of pique stepped towards Venner as he was going by, and stopped him.

"How long have you been here, Venner?" said he. "I didn't know you knew the Danbys."

"I daresay there are a good many things you don't know," said Venner, laughing, as he shook hands. "Glad to see you. Capital dance, isn't it? Don't let me keep you from your friends."

"I'll introduce you if you like," said Greville. He had not meant to go quite so far in his pique against Dora, and the minute he had made the proposal he was afraid of what she would say to him; but Venner's remark left him little choice.

"Miss Maine," he said, "may I introduce Mr. Venner to you? Mr. Venner, Mr. Erlscourt."

Dora bowed a little stiffly, with an indignant glance from behind her fan at Greville. Erlscourt acknowledged the introduction with no particular thought in his mind except that he did not like the man's face and should not cultivate the acquaintance.

"I suppose your card is full, Miss Maine?" said Venner.

It was not, and the young lady scored another point against poor Greville. She could not plead fatigue in a prophetic spirit, so she allowed Venner to put his initials against a schottische.

"I suppose," said Venner, turning to Erlscourt, "that you are almost tired of congratulations on the stir your pictures are making? I heard you were here to-night, but did not expect to have the pleasure of meeting you."

Erlscourt bowed. In truth, he was tired of the set phrases on both sides.

"Do you care for pictures?" asked Greville.

"I am ashamed to say, in present society," answered Venner, "that my tastes are not artistic. Still, I hear so much about this exhibition, and particularly one picture, I forget the name, that I shall go and see if I have in me any spark of the divine fire, even though it burns only internally."

"The end will be," said Erlscourt, laughing, "that you will be infinitely bored, and turn indifference into hate. I don't advise anybody to look at pictures who doesn't care at all for art. Now, Dora, there's the band, and this is my dance."

"Do you like that Mr. Venner?" said Dora, as she and her cavalier went into the other room. "I don't."

"Not particularly. He need not have told me he is not artistic. I knew that the minute I saw him."

"I don't like his face at all," repeated Dora, "and I wish I had had all my card filled. Do you mind when you have your next dance?"

"Not if it isn't too long before I get it, and it must be a waltz; you waltz better than any one else."

"Not too long and a waltz. Then please have the one before supper."

They were now amongst the dancers. Erlscourt said:

"Of course, I should prefer that, but I can't cut friendship, and I know by experience when you mean mischief."

Dora laughed and coloured, but she did not speak.

"What has Greville done?" asked Leigh, bending down to her a little, half smiling.

"You always find out everything," said Dora, in pettish veneration. "I didn't think you could be so unkind!"

Seeing she was really annoyed, he said not a word.

He would have liked to laugh, but would not have hurt her for the world, and Dora finished the dance without opening her lips.

Her vexation had cooled down, but she did not choose to show that it had.

Leigh had presumed a little too much, and he must not be pardoned too easily.

Nevertheless, as he would not have the dance before supper, she did not know but that Mr. Greville might as well have it, and it would be a good opportunity to lecture him.

Meanwhile, Erlscourt did not give her the chance of forgiving him.

He handed her back to his sister and left her.

This made Dora angry again, for she was certainly a little spoilt of late; and Greville's chances for that favourite dance before supper might have been spoiled had not Mrs. Challoner said she hoped Dora would be careful how she arranged her card.

Dora knew at whom this was levelled, and when Greville came up and begged for that dance she was a little more gracious than she had originally meant to be.

As the waltz went on she began to get very sorry that she had been angry with anybody, so that when Greville said softly:

"Are you still angry with me?" all her premeditated rebuke was swept away, and she just looked up and shook her head.

She could never tell him, of course, how nearly he had lost that dance that she had guarded for him half the evening. She hoped—nay, she was sure Leigh would not. But if anyone was happy that night it was Dora. All the Cousin Emlys in the world could not dim her delight. Even the dance with the objectionable Mr. Venner was endured.

Perhaps the person whom Dora's pleasure pleased least was Emily.

She had done all she could to throw the girl in Leigh's way, to put her under his care whenever possible.

Equally had she checked any informal visiting from Greville, and, indeed, almost snubbed him.

In her paramount desire to draw her brother away from a dangerous friendship she forgot the part Dora's heart might play.

She could scarcely imagine that any girl could prefer somebody else to Leigh; and, indeed, any apparent inclinations of Dora's in another direction she considered mere girlish flirting.

But to-night she was seriously disturbed, for Dora got her own way, and Leigh seemed to aid and abet her.

Their brother and sister ways were a stumbling-block in her way, but she had at last an inkling that to pit her will against her brother's generally led to defeat.

But she was not unjust enough to be cross to Dora. Her head, not her heart, was wrong. And, after all, there was some excuse for her.

Without children, with a house like clock-work, servants like machines, unvarying hours, and nothing to do, who would have grudged her a little scheming to fill up the empty hours?

CHAPTER XVII.

Mr. Gilbert Venner had his own reasons for being very well satisfied with the party at Mrs. Danby's. Mrs. Danby would probably not have been so satisfied with her guest had she overheard some conversation that followed that same night in a room in King's Club.

The worthy proprietor of that all-night establishment was smoking in one chair, and Gilbert Venner, still wearing his wrap coat over his evening dress, lounged in another, also smoking.

"Yes," he said, evidently continuing a conversation, "I hope to have done a good night's work. Greville will, I think, be right enough in time; comes here a little more often than he did."

"Slow and sure, I suppose," said King, "but at the rate he goes on it isn't worth the trouble. And he hasn't money enough—a poor artist!"

"He's not poor—he has some private means. No, he doesn't give us much encouragement, but still I have hopes of him. Play, George, is like wine; it gets a gradual hold, and once the hold is got the will to escape is gone."

"He didn't strike me as that sort of fellow," said George, "and I don't fancy affects you, Venner. Seems to me he is no good."

By which Mr. King did not at all mean to imply that Greville's morals were deficient.

"I like doing things on the Jews' principle," began Venner, when George interrupted him sharply:

"The Jews get quick profits—that's their principle."

Venner's heavy brows scowled.

"If you are dissatisfied—" he said, coldly. "Oh, dear, no—not at all," replied King, who had not meant to give offence. "You're so touchy sometimes. Who is this other fellow you've met?"

"The painter, Erlscourt. He's a friend of Greville's—schoolmates and that sort of thing, so that if one comes the other may. At any rate, I've been introduced, and can ripen the acquaintance. I know how to take people," said Venner, laughing complacently.

"The man is considered a genius, and no doubt thinks himself one. What did I do? Why, professed interest in his pictures; said I should go and see them. Of course, he'll be flattered, and respond to my advances."

"Has he got any money?" said George. "I don't know what he has got besides what he earns; but let me tell you, if you don't know it, that a successful painter now-a-days is not to be despised. He has no drawbacks; he is not married, and has no near relations but this sister, Mrs. Challoner, a great deal older than himself."

"Young men are not generally so particular to follow the advice of middle-aged sisters. And, by-the-bye, George, take care that you don't admit just anybody. Erlscourt has the reputation of being slightly fastidious. He's of very good family, and won't associate with everybody."

"A painter fellow, with no money, to give himself such airs!" said George, vulgarly. "I should like to know how he's any better than Wilson, who's one of the biggest fishes on the Stock Exchange."

There was enough of the gentleman left in Venner, in spite of the sort of life that will blacken the bluest blood, to make him sneer at this essentially plebeian remark.

"Pooh!" said he, with exasperating contempt. "What's the good of explaining the difference to you? Wilson's a cad with all his gold, and the other would even beg like a gentleman."

"Oh, you're a gentleman yourself, of course, Mr. Venner," said George, with a pitiful attempt to be scornful, which persons of his condition never can be.

"Of course I am," returned Venner, eyeing him steadily, "and I'd like to know how you'd get on if I were not?"

King's eyes shifted uneasily from the other's gaze. It was his last desire to seriously quarrel with Venner, and he was rather afraid that the gentleman blood he affected to despise might be stronger than self-interest.

"Oh, devil take it!" he said, with an awkward laugh, "you take things as if they were always meant. You're a ticklish one to deal with."

Venner did not condescend to answer this. Perhaps the refined atmosphere he had just left had made him more than usually conscious of the coarseness of his associate. Yet, after all, his polish was but the thinnest veneer.

George King was not a refined specimen of humanity, but there were some things he would not have done that Venner had not shrunk from.

Venner got up after a few minutes of silent puffing at his expiring cigar.

"Going?" asked King.

"Yes! Good night. See you to-morrow. We're all right still?"

"Quite!" was George's response to this mysterious remark.

Venner nodded, and went, not towards the principal entrance to the room, but to a small door that led into another chamber and down a back passage to an entry below, and door giving on the street.

It was some days before Venner actually went to Bond Street. It was to him a task, and not an agreeable one.

He would much rather have sat at the card-table, or been betting at Newmarket. Besides, agreeably to his estimate of Erlscourt, which he thought so shrewd—and which would have been if it hadn't happened to be wrong—he wanted the painter to be aware that he had been honoured by Venner's attendance.

To that end Gilbert indited a note to Morton Greville, asking him to take pity on his ignorance and go with him to the gallery.

Greville was annoyed by this note. He threw it across to Erlscourt, who was with him, with a "Deuce take it!"

"I didn't know you knew the man so much," said the other, reading the note. "Where did you pick him up?"

"Oh, at King's. I've been there two or three times."

"Yes, I know."

"He's a capital card player," said Greville; "and I'm rather fond of cards. That's all that's made me go."

"My dear fellow," said Erlscourt, "I'm not my sister, am I?"

"Oh, but you hate those sort of clubs so—and I don't like them. You see what it leads to."

"I might preach a sermon on the disasters resulting," said Leigh, gravely. "Venner is not a cad, however, though I am much mistaken if he isn't a *roué*. Are you going?"

"I had meant to go myself, and it's the only day I can manage this week; so, unfortunately, I am in a fix. By the bye, wasn't Thursday the day you were going to see the man at the gallery—what's his name—Foskett?"

"Yes, I know."

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"Yes. Do you want me to help you to endure Venner?"

"Be a good fellow, and come upstairs. I'll tell Venner you're going to call for me, and it will shorten my martyrdom. He knows no more of art than that chair there," giving the article in question a shove that sent it sprawling; "and he'll drive me frantic!"

"I shall have done with Fosskett about four," said Erlscourt. "I'll come for you then, if that will do?"

"First-rate. I am your eternal debtor!" But when that Thursday was over, Erlscourt thought he was the debtor.

"How do?" said Venner, his usual greeting, as he met Greville on the Thursday a-little after three in the entry of the Bond Street gallery.

Greville always found it hard to be cool to a man unless he positively hated him.

His feelings towards Venner were not of that pronounced type, so he responded to the greeting with a sufficient amount of cordiality which, no doubt, on other occasions had deceived Venner unconsciously.

"Sorry I can't be with you long," said he, with an admirable air of *vraisemblance*. "Erlscourt is to call for me at about four; but I darsay an hour is as much as you will manage among pictures. We'd better begin at No. 1."

Here he paused before a lovely Italian head. "That's one of the most exquisite heads I've ever seen. The colouring is wonderful!" and Greville went off into a rhapsody of technical terms, pulling himself up suddenly with a profound apology, at the same passing his hand over his mouth suspiciously.

"Pray forgive my enthusiasm," said he; "of course I am talking Greek," and indeed Venner stood before the picture with a mystified expression. "It is very pretty," he said, passing on to the next.

There is something calculated to try the most saintlike Christianity in going through a gallery of fine pictures with an unappreciative companion. Greville did not pretend to such heights, and suffered doubly. Though the room was full, there was not a soul in it he knew; he felt like a man on a desert island, and Erlscourt was the ship that was to come and rescue him. The hour dragged slowly.

"Suppose we change," said Greville, about half-past three; "we've finished one side, shall we go and see Headison's Norwegian landscape in the other room, and come back down the other side of this?"

Venner caught at this—he was bored to death. He could not see what Greville found to admire so intensely. Erlscourt was pre-eminently a figure painter, and he chose his subjects after a different fashion from many of his competers.

They were above and beyond Venner, who could understand them hardly at all. Even the sea-pieces, of which there were some, and a few paintings of the magnificent Indian scenery, he could not see far into. Everything was "very pretty," not because he thought so, but because it seemed the right thing to say.

When they came back into the first room, quite a little crowd of people were collected before a picture hanging not far from the door of entrance.

"What are they all looking at?" asked Venner.

"The favourite picture, 'Forsaken,'" said Greville. "I expect that's the one you spoke of the other night but couldn't remember the name. We shall get to it in a few minutes."

They joined the crowd, and by dint of patient waiting and dexterous insertion of themselves into every gap left, drew nearer and nearer to the picture.

"There's Erlscourt," said Greville, suddenly looking towards the doorway, and then he nodded, with a glance at the thick knot of people as much as to say, "Wait for me I can't get through this yet."

Erlscourt nodded back and stood leaning against the lintel, looking down from the vantage point the step gave him on the people pressing forward.

"Here we are in port at last," said Greville, with a breath of relief. "Jove! how people push! Here's the picture, Venner. Heavens! how beautiful it is!"

"Is this 'Forsaken'?" said Venner, leaning over the rail. He drew back suddenly, with a start and scarcely breathed "Ah!"

"What's the matter?" said Greville, "you look startled."

"It's very beautiful," said Venner, a shade paler than he had been, and looking, not at the picture as a whole, but at the face of the girl.

"You've paid a great compliment to the painter," said Greville, and instinctively his gaze went to the doorway again.

The brown eyes he sought were not looking at him at all, but at the man beside him, with a something in them—momentary—a flash—of what he could not tell, that made Greville hold his breath, till the eyes came back to his with a smile.

Startled—puzzled, Greville turned to Venner.

"You are stirred at last!" he said.

"Who—I?" said Venner. "Shall we get out of this infernal crush?"

They go out of it—not as quickly as either could have wished.

For their own reasons each wanted to reach Erlscourt.

Venner could have told why he wished it.

Not so Greville. He had only the sort of vague instinct of loving souls—that somehow there was trouble, and he must be at his friend's side.

"Well, old fellow!" he said, taking the instantly outstretched hand.

He felt, with a pained surprise, how close Erlscourt's grasp was; then loosening it, he turned to Venner.

"So you've braved the ordeal at last!" he said, smiling.

"I assure you it has not been an ordeal," answered Venner. "You have painted a wonderful picture there. It quite took me aback."

"Yes?" They were in the entry now, and all three paused.

"Which way do you go?" asked Erlscourt.

"I thought of taking a stroll down Piccadilly, and perhaps into the Park," said Venner.

"These rooms are awfully close!"

"Then your way lies with ours," said Erlscourt.

Greville looked at him, and felt that his friend avoided the look.

They went down Bond Street together.

Venner began,—

"Yes! a wonderful picture! How could you ever imagine such a face as that girl's? You had a model, of course?"

"Yes, but I am glad to say she looked a good deal happier than her representation. One can't always get the expression one wants."

"Then what do you do? An ordinary model—I suppose she was that?"

"A professional model—yes."

"Would not be able to even assume that expression?"

"It isn't necessary. One wants only the figure, the pose, the features. The expression belonged to the situation, and had to be imagined."

"Oh! imagined. I thought it was perhaps something you had seen," said Venner, with a suppressed satisfaction. "You see how ignorant I am."

"You've taken the first step to brush off your ignorance," said Greville, and then they talked about the theatres till Venner parted from them in the Park, and turned back again.

The minute he had gone Erlscourt quickened his pace with the action of a man who wants to fling off some oppression.

"Leigh," said Greville, after waiting in vain for the other to speak. "I don't understand you. What made you seek Venner's society when we might so easily have got rid of him? and then answer all his stupid questions?"

"Don't ask me anything to-day, Morton," said Erlscourt, in a suppressed way. "Only one thing—never tell him that either you or I know Violet Herbert. Nay, don't look at me, and, as you love me, think no harm of her."

"Leigh, what do you mean?"

Erlscourt did not answer the question, walking on as if he did not hear it. He kept his eyes down, seeming to notice nothing around him—so contrary to his usual way of observing everything that it increased Greville's perplexity.

"I will do anything you ask me, of course," he said. "Do you think it possible that Venner saw that likeness in the picture to Mrs. Herbert I noticed once? It is only in the shape and colour of the eyes. It must have been chance, for you didn't know her till you had nearly done the painting."

Only shape and colour to him! Was it to Venner? Chance? No, a thousand times! But Erlscourt only said:

"I don't know what I think."

For, indeed, he could not think at all. It had been a strain to keep up even that brief talk with Venner, and now alone with a man to whom he need never play a part, he could not at once arrange the chaos of conjectures that confused him.

(To be continued next week.)

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Each person has a duty he owes to the world—not a paltry, selfish duty of indulgence and gratification, but a duty toward the structure of posterity.

A little child with his whole future before him stood before a great man whose duty was well performed. "Fit yourself for a place in the world, for you may be the Premier of England some day," he said. It was somebody's duty to rear that child, to help him, to uplift his character, expand his mind, and to educate his mental qualities.

Parents are given this great responsibility, and have unlimited power over the formation of a future generation.

It is not necessarily one's own flesh and blood that claims the energies of a life duty. Thousands of men and women select within their radius homeless waifs, abandoned children, to uplift and to fit for a higher place in the world.

Youth seldom recognises the opportunities for a work that is neglected by their oversight in a selfish pursuit for their own happiness.

Many men and women seek happiness in a little narrow selfish circle, and, failing to find it, often count life a failure, and are ready to cut short their existence.

If they could but see the awaiting duty which their hands could perform, they would be ashamed of their utter selfishness. Where one seeks happiness after his own prescribed method, he seldom finds it. It is those who forget themselves in seeking others' happiness that find it at their own door, illuminating their lives a thousandfold.

Self-destruction is utterly and baselessly selfish. It brings sorrow to others who perhaps have had more than their share.—There is no merit or fortunate result from an unworthy act.

When the future seems blackest to the despondent young, their greatest stride to success may lie but momentarily hidden.

If every person recognised his duty toward the world, the present and the future, he would never wish to lie down before work was done. Daylight follows night, and sunshine is sure to come, however dark may seem the clouds. Work, not grief, is the solution to difficulties—life, not death, builds the great and beautiful history of the world.

THE GOLDEN HOPE

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Lady Redwoode, the owner and undisputed proprietor of all the fair domain of Redwoode, has been left a widow a year or more previous to the opening of the story. Lord Redwoode left no heir, but expressed a wish that on the decease of his wife the estates should pass to their nephew, Andrew Forsythe, and never doubted Lady Redwoode's compliance with his wishes. Mr. Forsythe was musing over many things, and wondering what would happen to him should his aunt marry again. Judge then of his surprise when Lady Redwoode tells him the story of her early life. Secretly married when quite a girl, in order not to arouse the anger of her brother, with whom she was living in India, there came a day when it was necessary to tell all, and the scene that followed caused Lady Redwoode to fall into convulsions, and she lay ill for many weeks. On returning to life and consciousness, it was to find herself a widow and a mother.

Sir Richard Haughton, although but twenty-seven, was lost all joy in life through an unhappy marriage. News is brought to him that his divorced wife, Margaret Borel, is dying, and the messenger eagerly begs an interview on the pretext that Margaret desires Sir Richard's forgiveness. Margaret fails to rekindle the old love, and swears that no other woman shall ever become his wife.

Now Lady Redwoode's brother is dead, and as an act of reparation has sent all the necessary proofs of her first marriage, but the secret of the identity of her own child dies with him. The two girls are coming to England, and it is for Lady Redwoode to discover which of the two is her daughter. After a little hesitation in coming to so momentous a decision, the choice falls on Cecile, who at once sets to work to ingratiate herself with Lady Redwoode at the expense of her foster-sister Hellice, and in this she is ably seconded by the Hindoo ayah. Cecile's relationship is proclaimed to the assembled household; and to Hellice, who watches this rejoicing without one pang of envy, there suddenly comes a feeling of loneliness, and she turns unobserved into the garden to seek comfort among the shade of the trees. It is thus that she discovers Sir Richard Haughton, who for one moment gazes on the lovely vision ere it is lost to view. "I must see her again," he says, "whoever and whatever she is I recognize her as my fate."

CHAPTER XLIV. (Continued.)

MR. ANCHESTER raised his weapon, but, like a spirit Hellice glided between him and his intended victim.

"If you fire you will kill me!" she said. "This old man who has befriended me shall not be killed on my account. You shall not make his good wife a widow because of me. Fire, Mr. Anchester."

She folded her arms calmly, and looked at him with a gaze that thrilled him even in that mood. To fire then would be to kill her. She had interposed herself as the old man's shield, and she would sacrifice herself to save him.

"Very well!" said Mr. Anchester, with a forced and husky laugh, "I'll spare the old man. As to the marriage ceremony, we'll wait for that until confinement has subdued your spirit, Miss Hellice. Mine you shall be. I have sworn it!"

"Your lawless ways won't do in this country!" cried Mr. Locke, with stern emphasis. "You will find that the law will protect us—"

"This neighbourhood is too lonely and uninhabited for me to be greatly frightened by your threats," sneered Mr. Anchester. "I defy you and your laws. I make my own laws—to do just as I please, always and everywhere. It is my pleasure to marry Miss Hellice. I intend now to carry her off where you and your laws will be unable to find her."

He thrust his pistol into his pocket. A moment he stood with flaming face and swelling veins, like a tiger about to spring. He looked towards his waiting carriage, and uttered a peculiar whistle, evidently meant as a signal.

Then, with a quick, unexpected bound, he leaped to the minister's side, tore the shrieking girl from the old man's clinging grasp, caught her up in his arms, and bounded with her to the open gate.

To thrust her into the carriage, to follow himself and close the door, to bid the coachman drive on, were all the work of a moment.

When the minister and his wife aroused from their momentary paralysis the carriage was fleeing up the road like the wind, and they

heard but faintly the screams of the unhappy maiden as she was borne from them.

Hellice speedily felt that there was no hope for immediate escape. The country through which they were passing had no roadside houses for miles. She comprehended that her enemy was in a savage, reckless mood, and that she would injure herself by further irritating him. So she became silent, determining to maintain a constant watchfulness for a chance of escape.

"There, that is better!" said Mr. Anchester, releasing the hold he had maintained about her waist. "You have played me some fine tricks, Miss Hellice, but I think we are nearly even now!"

"Not quite!" replied the undaunted maiden. "You can carry me off, Mr. Anchester, but you cannot compel me to marry you. I am on my guard now against drugs. And you know very well that I am not to be intimidated by pistols or blows!"

"Perhaps starvation may alter your views!" said Mr. Anchester, angrily. "A dungeon may subdue you. I shall try both, at all events!"

"What unparalleled devotion! What an exhibition of tender love!" exclaimed Hellice, ironically, recovering her spirit and courage. "You told me one day, you know, that you were ready to die for me. Since I will not accept your offer, you intend, I suppose, to make me die for you! I must say I have read of many plans for winning hearts, but novelists have left out this most unique style of love-making. How many days of dungeon life and starvation do you think, Mr. Anchester, it will take to make me love you? How many chains and fetters will it take to make me adore you?"

"If you persist in goading me you shall have the trial," cried Mr. Anchester, furiously.

"It seems to me, Mr. Anchester, that you strongly resemble the Africans," said Hellice. "I have read somewhere of a tribe whose practices are very similar to yours. When a young man of the tribe falls in love with a young lady, he procures a hard club, seizes a suitable opportunity, knocks her senseless, and carries her to his tent. Your style of love-making is so like his that I recommend you to emigrate to that happy country, where you must inevitably feel at home!"

This mocking address completely exasperated Mr. Anchester. He desired to see the maiden weeping and grief-stricken. He could not understand her cool defiance.

"I think you do not comprehend your situation," he said. "Do you know that you are being carried to a dungeon, to harshness, to cruelty?"

"Certainly, since I know that you are taking me!"

"Is a marriage with me worse than the terrors I have pictured?"

"Infinitely. Better death than a marriage with you!" cried Hellice, in a passionate voice.

"I loathe, despise, hate you!"

"Yet a few weeks of confinement will tame your proud spirit!" said Mr. Anchester. "What is it that keeps up your courage now, Hellice? You are deserted by your lover, cast out by your relatives, suspected of an atrocious crime, or series of crimes! You are poor and friendless. Why is it that you are not crushed and heart-broken?"

"Because I trust in Heaven!" said Hellice, so reverently that her enemy was abashed.

"Because I have a hope—a sweet and precious hope—that these clouds will soon clear away, and the sun of happiness will shine upon me again!"

"It never will unless you marry me. Hellice, you have driven me to desperation. You know I love you to madness—"

"I should think so," interrupted the girl, drily. "Let us understand each other, Darcy

Ancheater. It was Cecile whom you loved in India. You know you did not care for me then. It was Cecile whom you followed to England. You deserted her for your self-interest. You have a belief that by marrying me you will improve your fortunes. In short, Darcy Ancheater, you either believe me to be Lady Redwoode's daughter, or else you intend to pass me off as such!"

Mr. Ancheater started, and turned away his head from the keen glance that read his countenance.

"What nonsense!" he said, gruffly. "Am I incapable of generosity and disinterested affection?"

"Since you ask the question, I will answer frankly. I think you are," replied Hellice, quietly.

Mr. Ancheater flushed with rage. With difficulty he refrained from striking the maiden. Although she was indisputably his prisoner, she seemed after all to be mistress of herself and him. His roughness and violence affected her no more than if she had been marble. He felt himself powerless, this giant of thieves and sinews, and strangely insignificant before her scornful gaze.

"Since you will not love, you shall fear me," he ejaculated. "Fear or love, it's all the same, since you shall wed me!"

Hellice yawned, as if the discussion had become tiresome to her, and leaned back on her cushions. The carriage was proceeding more slowly now, and an idea had entered her head. She pretended to be exhausted, and half closed her eyes, as if about to slumber. Mr. Ancheater was persuaded that such was her intention. For some time her dark eyes gleamed brightly from their half-shut lids, then they disappeared from view altogether; the long lashes settled themselves upon the dark, bright cheek, and her breathing became quiet and regular.

"She's asleep!" muttered Mr. Ancheater. "What a little vixen she is! No man would have dared to brave me as she did. It will be pleasant to tame her, but I foresee I shall have much trouble!"

Full of satisfaction, he leaned back in his corner, and shut his eyes lazily, made drowsy by the summer heat. He did not sleep—he was too cautious for that—and he was not quite unconscious that Hellice's head was drooping lower upon her breast, that she stirred uneasily, that she gathered her garments compactly together in her hands, and that she finally drooped her head upon the panel of the door, the window having been lowered. He was vaguely conscious of all this, but he attached no importance to the facts. The carriage was progressing, although slowly, the driver was on his guard, and he himself had the quickness of a lion's spring. He had no fears of an attempted escape.

But if he were as quick as a lion, Hellice had the lightness and agility of a panther. Apparently, however, she had no intention of using those physical attributes. She dropped one arm outside the carriage window indolently, as if in the forgetfulness of sleep, and breathed so heavily that Mr. Ancheater was completely deceived by her movements.

But suddenly the panther-like alertness came into play.

The little hand outside turned the knob, the door swung open; Hellice, wide-awake, bright-eyed, and with every needed faculty of mind and body aroused to activity, sprang up, and leaped out before Mr. Ancheater could raise a hand to detain her.

He followed in swift pursuit. The carriage halted, and the driver sprang from his box.

Hellice cast a quick glance up and down the road. There were no houses within sight. Nothing but bare fields met her gaze. In one direction the road was clear. In the other, the one in which the carriage had been proceeding, she beheld two horsemen coming. To appeal to the protection of these horsemen was her instant decision.

Evading the grasp of Mr. Ancheater's out-

stretched hands, she turned, and ran fleetly along the road towards the approaching men. Her superior lightness and quickness told in her favour. Here, where both were on foot, she had greatly the advantage. It is probable that in a long contest, where endurance would be required, Mr. Anchester could not have failed to win, but here, with the goal in view, his endurance was of no avail to him.

One of the horsemen, apparently comprehending the scene, spurred his steed, and came on like a wild Arab. As Hellice and he neared each other he slackened his speed.

"Help, help!" cried the maiden, hearing the two men, Mr. Anchester and the driver, behind her, and fearing that the horseman might hesitate to befriend her. "Oh, help me!"

Her shriek was changed to a glad cry that came from the depths of her soul. She had reached the horseman's side, and looked up into his face, and had recognised him as the one dearest to her of all the earth.

"Oh, Richard, Richard!" she sobbed, hysterically. "Save me!"

Sir Richard Haughton, for the horseman was he, echoed Hellice's joyful cry. He sprang from his steed. With one hand he gathered his betrothed to his bosom. His right hand he thrust in the breast of his coat, and drew forth a revolver, which he presented at the two men, who had instinctively halted.

"Advance one step further," he said, sternly, with a lightning glance at the pursuers, "and I will shoot you!"

For answer, Mr. Anchester fired his pistol at the Baronet.

It whistled past Sir Richard's ears without doing him any injury.

"Now you are at my mercy!" said the young Baronet, with an implacable sternness that stirred the coward soul of Mr. Anchester to deadly fear. "I hold six shots here. You are unarmed. I am tempted to punish your falsehoods, your treachery, your baseness, your cruelty, as they deserve. Yet why stain my hands with the blood of a reptile like you?"

He paused as the second horseman came up. Mr. William Haughton flushed with joy at sight of Hellice, yet calm enough to hold a revolver also firmly in his hand.

"You see I am strong enough now to do as I please with you," continued Sir Richard. "I have also suspected your good faith of late. I have suspected that you were concerned in Hellice's disappearance. I came here to rescue her—to punish you. And yet I bid you go! Get into your carriage and drive off unharmed. I leave you to a fate that will revenge Hellice's wrongs sooner or later!"

Anchester saw the folly of contesting the will of his antagonist. Cursing himself for not having been better armed, he crept into his carriage and closed the door. Under the same powerful persuasive as that which had compelled his master's obedience, the driver mounted to his box, cracked his whip, and the carriage rolled away.

And then Sir Richard Haughton, with his stern, proud face, seamed with lines that had been traced by grief at Hellice's loss, but now glowing with the brightness and softness of a glorious sunrise, looked into the pure and loving face of his betrothed.

"Hellice!" he whispered, and his voice thrilled the maiden with ineffable bliss, it was at once so joyful, rapturous, and full of supreme happiness. "Found at last! my darling!"

He clasped her again and again to his breast; he lavished a world of caresses upon her; he rained tears upon her head; and called her by all the tender epithets he had feared never to use again.

"Let me speak to her some time or other, won't you?" asked Mr. Haughton, at last, impatiently. "Give me a chance, Dick. You seem to forget I am here, and that I have human feelings as well as you!"

Thus reminded of his selfishness, the overjoyed lover permitted his uncle to pay his

congratulations to Hellice. This he did in paternal style, and then relinquished the maiden's hand, placing it again in that of the Baronet.

"There you are!" he said, briefly, yet comprehensively. "Don't let anybody nor anything come between you again. If you are not happy now it isn't my fault!"

"Oh, Richard, how did you find me?" asked Hellice, all smiles and blushes, the old autumn-leaf bloom in her cheeks, the old, sweet shy light in her bright eyes.

"I found you by tracing Mr. Anchester, my darling! I went to the Rookery this very day, after Mr. Anchester had left it. A foolish lad told me where to find you. So we came on, arriving just in time to save you from a dreadful fate. Let me mount you on my horse, my darling, and I will walk beside you, while we proceed to the manse. We will talk as we go along. I have much to say to you!"

He raised her tenderly to his saddle, and walked beside her, holding her hand in his. Mr. Haughton rode at her right hand, and thus, lovingly escorted, Hellice set on her return to the manse.

CHAPTER XLV.

Hellice Glintwick's heart filled to overflowing with joy too great for words, as, with one hand clasped in her lover's, who walked beside her, she rode slowly back towards the manse. The world seemed transformed in her sight. Never had skies been so blue, air so sweet, songs of birds so musical. The sights and sounds of Nature blended with ineffable happiness. One thought alone arose from the sweet tumult in her soul. One fact alone—but that, like the handwriting on the wall in ancient days—stood out from the chaos of her mind. She was safe—Sir Richard was with her—and the old, true love, deepened more than ten-thousand-fold, proclaimed itself in his voice, manner, and bearing.

For some time neither spoke. Perhaps it was that their eyes uttered a language tenderer than words would have conveyed. Perhaps it was that the deep red, flitting in and out of the girl's dark cheeks, like wild birds fluttering about their nest, were more eloquent than loving epithets and assurances. In the sweet, rapturous silence, with hand clasped in hand, their souls communed together, and neither was conscious that the other had not spoken.

"Perhaps my presence is considered an intrusion," said Mr. William Haughton, at last, in an aggrieved tone, having borne the silence with extreme uneasiness. "If so, I'll fall behind. I must be allowed to say, however, that this is hardly the return I expected for bringing you two together again. You both seem to have forgotten your native language!"

Thus recalled to himself, the young Baronet looked at Hellice with a flushing cheek and gathering calmness. The words he longed to utter he reserved for a more fitting period. The caresses he longed to bestow he kept till they should be alone.

"Why did you run away from me, little Hellice?" he asked, and the girl felt his tones to be indescribably tender. "I have discovered that you left Holly Bank with Mr. Anchester. But why?"

"Because Miss Kenneth had written to Lady Redwoode, saying that I had attempted to poison her. She was really ill, Richard, and her fright and illness gave her a look that would have convinced almost anyone of my guilt. Mr. Anchester found me in the Holly Bank garden in my hour of greatest distress. He told me that he had followed me from India because he loved me. He assured me that your pride would not allow you to marry a twice-suspected poisoner. He said that you were fearful of being deceived a second time, and that Lady Redwoode would never consent to our marriage. He offered me his friendship, since I refused his love. He had been papa's intimate friend, and an inmate of our Indian home. I believed my friends had all deserted me. His familiar face seemed better

than a stranger's. And so—and so—"

"And so you accepted his friendship and protection," said Sir Richard, as the girl's voice faltered, and he smiled gravely, yet reassuringly, upon her. "Poor, guileless little dove! You little dreamed that you were flying direct into the snare of the fowler. I arrived at Holly Bank the night after your disappearance. Imagine my consternation to find you gone! Hellice, whatever joy the future may bring, I can never forget my desolation at that moment! Poor Lady Redwoode, too—"

He stopped abruptly, turning away his head to hide his sudden tears, while Mr. Haughton permitted his horse to fall behind the young couple, that his half-suppressed sobs might not attract attention.

"Did Lady Redwoode grieve too at my disappearance?" cried Hellice, not observing her companion's emotion.

"Yes! my darling," replied Sir Richard. "She always had suspicions that she might have chosen wrongly between you and Cecil, and her suspicions returned then with renewed force! She said to me, 'Perhaps it is my daughter who is wandering homeless and friendless, while the child of my enemy occupies her rightful place!' We sought everywhere, employed detectives, but could find no trace of you. At length I learned that Mr. Anchester had been seen at the North Eldon Station. I had discovered that he had known you in India, and so leapt to the conclusion that he knew your present whereabouts."

"After Cecil's marriage, Mr. Anchester left Redwoode a second time. I resolved to trace him. It was a work of time and patience, for he had taken a circuitous route, but I was at last rewarded with success. I have told you already of my visit to the Rookery. I learned without difficulty that a young lady had been met some weeks ago at the station by the Rookery carriage, and was directed easily enough. A weak-witted lad and a frightened old woman at the Rookery told me where next to look. To what place was Mr. Anchester taking you?"

"I don't know," answered Hellice. "He was determined to marry me, even against my will. He has hunted me and persecuted me as if I were a criminal. He pretends to love me, and I think he does. But, Sir Richard," she added, solemnly, "I believe he has another reason for persecuting me. He believes that by a marriage with me he will attain rank and fortune."

"How so, darling?"

"He believes me to be the daughter of Lady Redwoode, or else wishes to pass me off as such," was the grave and thoughtful response. "As I said, he was papa's most intimate friend. Of all men he was most likely to share papa's secrets. Do you think me wild or foolish, dear Sir Richard, but I have thought, too, that Lady Redwoode may have chosen wrongly between Cecil and me. At first I had no doubts. But now something—perhaps instinct—tells me that my love and reverence for Lady Redwoode is the love and reverence of a daughter. I feel that I am her child. My heart cries out for her. I never loved my supposed parents as I love this beautiful lady. Am I wild and fanciful? Do you despise me for my vain longings?"

She looked at her lover through a mist of tears, her exquisite face so full of longing and yearning for the motherly love which Cecil had claimed, that the Baronet's heart died for her. He comprehended that she had not yet heard of the supposed death of Lady Redwoode. He dreaded the effect of such a communication upon her. He could not bear to cloud the brightness of their reunion with a cloud so dark, so dense, and terrible, as a narration of Lady Redwoode's fate.

He turned, making a gesture commanding silence to his uncle, who instinctively hushed his grief, and fell still farther into the rear, that Hellice might not mark his emotion.

"I do not think you wild and fanciful, Hellice," said the young Baronet, gently and

gravely: "I have had thoughts, too, that would corroborate or strengthen yours. But we had better not discuss them at present. Let us be practical, and think of the immediate present."

The girl assented, wonderingly: "This Mr. Anchester," said Sir Richard, thoughtfully, "is a lawless man, with no respect for life or laws. This Scottish neighbourhood is wild and lonely. It has few inhabitants, and they are mostly fishermen. Their profession keeps them out at sea, sometimes for days. Mr. Anchester is a sort of king in his little valley. The few labourers I saw there were ignorant men, with the single idea of earning their bread and keeping their humble homes to which they are attached. They would obey Mr. Anchester as readily as if they were his serfs. You will wonder what all this means. Simply, my darling, that a prolonged stay in this vicinity will endanger our lives or safety. Mr. Anchester went away as a man who is worsted, not conquered. In my opinion he will return this very night, armed and supported by his men, and seek to take you from me by force."

"What shall we do?" asked Hellice, growing pale.

"We must be gone when he arrives."

"Where shall we go? Not to Redwoode, dear Richard! I cannot go there until Lady Redwoode recalls me."

"No. You are right," said Sir Richard, pressing her hand. "Let me take you to Sea View as my wife, Hellice!" he added, in an impassioned tone. "This Scottish minister can marry us."

The maiden shook her head sadly. "Dear Sir Richard!" she said, softly, "it cannot be. So long as Lady Redwoode forbids our union, so long we must keep apart. I can never marry in face of her opposition. I can never become your wife while this cloud of disgrace is hanging over my head. When I can come to you honoured by others, as your bride should be honoured, I will come."

Sir Richard did not attempt to combat this resolution. He believed that he could set it aside by telling Hellice of Lady Redwoode's supposed death, and he bided his time. He talked of other subjects, dear to them both, and the two were equally surprised when they came at last to the manse.

They approached the gate quietly. Hellice was lifted from her steed, and she then hurried into the dwelling, her face glowing with joy.

The minister and his wife were sitting in the alcove in attitudes of the deepest grief. They looked up at sight of their young guest with glances they would have accorded a spectre. They had been signalling in vain to some of the fishing boats out at sea, in hopes of rescuing the maiden, but had resigned themselves at last to painful inaction.

"It is I, my friends!" said Hellice, smiling at their incredulous stare. "I am come back to you safe and well. This gentleman, my friend, Sir Richard Houghton," and she pointed to the Baronet, who stood behind her, while her face burned with blushes, "saved me from Mr. Anchester's hands!"

The sound of her voice broke the spell enchanting the good couple. They sprang up, and before Hellice had ceased speaking, they had clasped her in their arms, gathered her to their hearts, and overwhelmed her with caresses.

No daughter coming home after a long absence could have received a heartier welcome from loving parents than Hellice gained from these true-hearted friends.

The greetings were at length over. Sir Richard Houghton had been thanked and admired enough to have contented the vainest man in the kingdom. Mr. Houghton came in for his share of gratitude, which he coolly repelled by, declaring that he had a personal interest in the maiden's rescue, that she was engaged to marry his nephew, and that he was in duty bound to overcome all obstacles in the way of marriage.

When the household had regained its calmness, and Mrs. Locke began to contemplate the possibility of a return to housekeeping cares, and the good simple-minded minister had become involved in an amicable controversy with Mr. Houghton, concerning some of the impossible mechanical schemes of the latter, the young baronet led his betrothed out into the garden.

There was a little rustic bench under a beech tree, screened from view by a thick growth of currant bushes, and the lovers took possession of this bench and engaged in conversation.

"I have been thinking, Richard," said Hellice, with downcast eyes and shy blushes, "that I had better go back to Redwoode. I have been too proud, too wayward, too wilful. Suppose that I am really Lady Redwoode's daughter and Cecile only her niece. In that case I should be doing wrong to stay away and leave her at the mercy of one whom I know to be unscrupulous and wicked. Richard, I must go back. I will tell her all the truth. I went to her chamber that night to save her, not to destroy her. It was Cecile who would have poisoned her!"

"I knew all that before, my darling!"

"But she—Lady Redwoode—does not know it. Take me to her, Richard. Take me at once!"

"Hellice!" said her lover, drawing her to his bosom, and speaking so gently and so

gravely that the girl felt as if listening to the lowest and saddest of music. "Let me speak more plainly than I have yet done. I believe you to be Lady Redwoode's daughter!"

"You do, Richard?" cried Hellice, with irrepressible gladness and eagerness. "Oh, Richard! But Lady Redwoode—will she—ah, no, she loves Cecile best. She believes me bad and wicked. She will never, never claim me," and the girl nestled closer to the Baronet, giving utterance to a hard, dry sob.

"Never, never!" repeated Sir Richard, with solemn emphasis. "Never in this world, Hellice!"

"Why not, Richard?" asked the girl, with sudden dread, caused by this unexpected confirmation of her forebodings.

"I mean, my darling," was the reply, uttered with infinite tenderness, "that if you are Lady Redwoode's daughter, your mother can never embrace you as her child, until you meet each other in the courts of heaven. Hellice, do you not comprehend? Lady Redwoode knows the whole truth now. She knows whether she chose wrongly or rightly when she took Cecile to her heart and looked coldly upon you."

Hellice raised her head, regarding her lover in shocked astonishment.

"What!" she ejaculated, in a hollow whisper.

"She has gone to live with the angels," said Sir Richard, his blue eyes filling with tears.

"Dead!" whispered Hellice, in bewilderment. "Dead!"

The Baronet bowed his head in silence.

"Dead, and I was not with her!" said the girl, her eyes gleaming with startling effect from the midst of her deadly white face. "Dead, and she did not dream how I loved her! Dead!"

"She was my friend, too, my noble, true, earnest friend," said Sir Richard, his features working with agitation. "Hellice, I have suffered, too, by her loss. Let us comfort each other!"

"How did she die?" asked Hellice, with wild and tearless eyes.

"She was drowned. After the marriage of Cecile and Andrew Forsythe, the young couple, with her ladyship and the Hindoo woman, went on a bridal tour, or excursion, to some distant seaport town. It was while there that Lady Redwoode met her fate. Mr. Forsythe, with his wife and Lady Redwoode, went out sailing. They had but one boatman, and the wind was boisterous, the sea rough.

How it happened I cannot clearly understand. There was a capsizing. Mr. Forsythe, Cecile, and the boatman clung to the boat. Lady Redwoode was swept by the wind and current into a vortex known as the Pool. She was drowned, Hellice, and the sea still holds its dead!"

Hellice's eyes glowed strangely. Her bright, passionate face became stern, almost fierce, in its expression. Her glowing mouth that seemed meant to woo caresses, as roses woo the bees, was set in a smile of terrible meaning.

She had comprehended, as had no other, the horrible significance of that story.

"Richard," she said, her voice thrilling him by its changed tones, "I see what you do not. Lady Redwoode was decoyed to her doom. It was a pre-arranged plan. She was drowned by design!"

Sir Richard was startled, as well he might be, by this announcement, and Hellice's manner impressed him uncomfortably with a belief in its possibility.

"They plotted it together—Renee and Cecile," continued Hellice. "Oh, if I had only told the truth concerning that attempted poisoning! If I had only gone back to Redwoode after quitting Holly Bank! I knew what Cecile was, and yet I did not warn her!"

Her voice died out in a sob. Her overstrained brain sought relief in a violent and uncontrollable burst of weeping. Her lover did not check her tears. He held her in his arms and smoothed her hair, told the story of the supposed drowning, and wept with her, till the violence of the maiden's grief gave place to an unnatural calm.

Then he spoke again.

"This may comfort you, my darling," Sir Richard said, gently, "to know that towards the last Lady Redwoode believed that she had greatly wronged you. She withdrew her opposition to our marriage. She was even prepared to receive you with love and kindness, and possibly to acknowledge you as her child."

"That is the reason why they killed her!" said Hellice, moaning.

"No home remains to you but mine, Hellice. You have enemies—Mr. Anchester, Cecile, Mr. Forsythe, and Renee. Give me the right of a husband to protect you. Let this old minister unite us—"

"No, Richard. Let us not talk of marriage in this hour. My mother is dead. I know she was my mother! Until this awful pain in my heart ceases I cannot think of marriage. Do not urge me, dearest Richard, but give me time to mourn for the dead. Take me away from here at once. Is far from here to the spot where she was—was drowned?"

"That was in England. This is Scotland. It was perhaps seventy miles distant—possibly less."

"Take me there!" pleaded the girl. "Let me look at the spot where she lies beneath the sea. Show me the places where she last visited. Let me see where this terrible iniquity took place. You will not deny me, Richard?"

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Sent Free.

The Baronet had no thought of denying her request. With true and noble generosity he forebore to urge the desired marriage. He knew that she had thought only for her lost friend. Her heart was full of grief and mourning. It would seem to her sacrilege to think of marriage now.

"You shall go to the spot where Lady Redwoode perished!" he declared. "I have been there. I have seen the Pool in which she sleeps—the house where she slept the night before her death. I will take you to Sea View, Hellice. My home must be yours, if I abandon it myself. It will be even more convenient than otherwise to leave this place by water. We might be waylaid in proceeding to the station by Mr. Anchester and his men, but if we leave to-night in a boat we may elude him."

The matter was thus settled.

As soon as Hellice had regained her calmness sufficiently to be left to herself, the Baronet walked down to the hamlet, having noticed the arrival of a couple of fishing-boats. The better one he hired for the intended journey, stipulating that it should be rendered fit for a lady's occupancy. He arranged to start at nightfall, providing the wind was favourable, and then returned to the manse to inform Hellice of his preparations.

During the remainder of the day nothing was seen of Mr. Anchester or his hirelings.

At nightfall the young couple and Mr. Haughton took an affectionate leave of Mr. and Mrs. Locke, and went down to the sloop. The wind was favourable, the night was bright with starlight, and the two boatmen were in excellent spirits over the extravagant remuneration promised them.

"Naething can beat the 'Auld Ailsie,'" said the owner of the sloop, proudly. "I reckon we're in for some kind o' scrape, Billy, for I seed some chaps down by the bay nearest the Rookery two hours ago, when I wor on Tom's smack, you know, an' I thought they meant us mischief. Let 'em do their worst. I'd like the chance o' doin' suthin' in return for my big pay, that's all!"

As he concluded the sails were shaken out, and the boat went skimming over the waters.

CHAPTER XLVI.

While Lady Redwoode and Hellice were undergoing such painful vicissitudes and trials, all was brightness and joy at Redwoode Manor.

The wicked schemers were prospering. Cecile had entered upon her heritage as the only and lawful heiress of the Baroness. She reigned like a young queen, but no queen could have successfully rivalled her in haughtiness, superciliousness, and imperiousness.

Mr. Forsythe upheld her sway, delighted to share her power and honour, and to possess at last an almost limitless purse.

The servants and tenants had learned the difference between the gentle, sympathising Lady Redwoode, whose purse and heart had ever been open to their wants and needs, and this unworthy successor, whose first step had been to raise rents and depress wages, refusing even to read the humble petition, with which her dependents strove to soften her hard-heartedness.

There had been other changes at Redwoode. Renee, the Hindoo ayah, now sat all day long in the family or state apartments of the mansion, took her place at the table presided over by Cecile, and took upon herself the active duties of superintendent of indoor affairs. It was quite edifying to see the brown-faced East Indian, in robes of rustling silk with fashionable train, with astonishing turbans, gorgeous in colouring, and with jewels of value adorning every available portion of her person, engaged in directing the astonished and bewildered housekeeper, the portly steward, the self-complacent butler. Yet each and all of these dignitaries, who had hitherto enjoyed undisputed sway in her or his special province, was made to understand

that rebels against Renee's authority were to be dismissed without mercy.

The household had been thus remodelled, but there still remained a "Mordecai at the gate" in the person of Mr. Kenneth, the astute old lawyer, the faithful single-hearted friend of Lady Redwoode, the sincere and uncomplimented mourner of her supposed death.

The sight of his pale face and swollen eyes had become intolerable to the young married pair. His every glance seemed to them an embodied reproach. They had been obliged to keep him at Redwoode to facilitate the settlement of the Baroness's affairs, but his presence and his services were now no longer needed.

One afternoon—the day subsequent to the removal of Lady Redwoode to Sorel Place from the fisherman's cottage—Cecile and Andrew Forsythe were seated together in the Redwoode drawing-room. The apartment was full of light and pleasantness. A great tide of fragrance poured in from the conservatory through the parted glass partition. The summer air filtered in through open windows and flowing lace curtains, filling the room with a delicious, genial coolness.

Cecile, robed in the deepest mourning, with multitudinous bands of crape on her dress, occupied the great arm-chair. The luxurious sweeping folds of her fashionable robe lay upon the gay carpet around her like a sable cloud. Her golden hair was filleted with a narrow black ribbon, which fell over her shoulder in streaming ends. In one hand she held carelessly a dainty cambric handkerchief, the larger share of which was comprised in a mourning border.

She wore her sombre attire with something of coquettishness, knowing how well it set off her blonde beauty. There was no shadow of grief on her fair face.

Alone with her husband, who knew her so well, what need was there of the mockery of

sorrow? She looked complacent, satisfied, jubilant.

Mr. Forsythe reclined carelessly near her upon a velvet couch, attired also in mourning. The summit of his hopes and schemes had been attained. He was master of Redwoode at last. And yet he was not altogether happy. The lady of Redwoode had been his friend, his almost mother. How had he repaid her kindness and love?

The memory of the hour in which he had struck her hand from the upturned boat, to which she had sought to cling, had not deserted him for a single waking instant. The guilt of murder and ingratitude hung like a pall over him even in his greatest triumph and jubilation. He might seem happy, but as was a haunted man.

"Well, Cecile," he said, half-enviously, "how satisfied and pleased you look! Your face shows not the faintest trace of care—"

"Why should it?" interrupted the young bride, with a carelessness he envied. "You are actually morbid, Andrew. Would you wish matters as they were on the day of our marriage?"

Mr. Forsythe answered shudderingly in the negative.

"Our affairs have established themselves upon a comfortable basis," continued Cecile, trifling with her marriage ring. "Poor mamma's affairs are all cleared up. Mr. Kenneth finished yesterday—"

"Yes, and when he handed me the last papers and accounts last evening," interposed Mr. Forsythe, with flushing face, "he spoke bitterly of our 'indecent haste' in the matter. Those were his very words."

"Indeed!" commented Cecile, composedly. "Mr. Kenneth forgets his position, I think. I do not like him, Andrew. You must send him away this very day. I will not have him in the house longer. 'Indecent haste!' What is he that he should presume to con-

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ment upon the affairs or movements of people like us?"

"Oh, 'a cat may look at a king,' you know," responded Mr. Forsythe. "Kenneth has been Lady Redwoode's adviser for years. He was the Baron's most confidential counsellor. He knows all the family secrets, if there be any. He is a scholar and gentleman. If he had not been, he would never have been in such high favour at Redwoode. But you are right. He must go. I haven't forgiven him his prosy admonitions to reform in the old days when my uncle was living. I shall be glad when he is gone."

"Dismiss him immediately," said Cecile. "I cannot bear to meet his keen, sharp glances. He seems to me to suspect something—"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Mr. Forsythe, touching a bell-pull that hung beside him. "What an absurd fancy. Don't get cowardly now, Cecile, after having been the moving spirit throughout the entire affair!"

Mrs. Forsythe made no response; a hall-porter entering at that moment in answer to summons, Mr. Forsythe gave him a message requesting the presence of Mr. Kenneth in the drawing-room, and the man departed on his errand.

A few moments elapsed, and Mr. Kenneth made his appearance.

He was also dressed in deep mourning, but his sombre garments seemed in keeping with his thoughts. He was very sad, and had the look of one upon whom a heavy blow has fallen unexpectedly.

His round face had lost its rosiness, and was of preternatural length. His forehead had gained many wrinkles, and deep lines had been traced about the down-drawn mouth. His eyelids were heavy, red, and swollen with much weeping, and his eyes had a strangely suspicious expression as he looked from one to the other of the young people.

"You sent for me?" he said, folding his arms, and speaking with dignity.

"I did," replied Forsythe. "I merely wished to say, Mr. Kenneth—but be seated. We can talk at our leisure."

"Thank you, I prefer standing," said the old lawyer. "And, Mr. Forsythe, permit me to anticipate your communication. I have decided to leave Redwoode. It will be impossible for me to remain longer in your service."

"Just what I was about to say," returned Mr. Forsythe, in surprise. "I am glad we think alike on the subject, Kenneth. Lady Redwoode's business is now in such shape that it will settle itself. I shall be my own chief adviser. You had better go to Holly Bank, and your very liberal pension, left you by my late uncle, Lord Redwoode, will of course be continued to you. I trust that the matter is agreeably settled."

The lawyer's brows contracted and darkened. He paid no heed to what Mr. Forsythe had said, but responded, in a harsh, troubled voice,—

"Before I go, I must be permitted to unburden my mind with some freedom. I will not remark upon the singular and ill-timed jubilation of yourself and your wife. I will not remark upon the overbearing manner of Mr. Forsythe in her late mother's home. But I will say that this greediness to possess Lady Redwoode's property before her body has found a resting-place is to me simply appalling. I cannot conceive that a daughter so tenderly loved as Miss Cecile was could act with such heartlessness. The task that should devolve upon you both I shall take upon myself. I am going back to the spot where Lady Redwoode was drowned. The Pool shall be searched, if it be a thousand miles deep. The body of my loved and honoured friend shall repose beside that of Lord Redwoode, if I devote my life to the task of its recovery!"

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2021. Back numbers can be obtained through any news-agent.)

Care of the Hand

No feature of the physique is more subtly fascinating than a beautiful hand, and there is no member of the body by which the character of an individual may be more correctly read. It has been said that the hand is to our thoughts what the face is to our emotions, giving expression and accent to them.

Every woman possesses in her hand a power that, when developed and trained, wields a wonderful influence. By a thousand different positions, and by innumerable attitudes of the fingers, the hand translates a great part of our thoughts and feelings.

For many years women have laboured under the impression that to have a beautiful hand, the hand that proclaims the distinction of refined birth and breeding, one must be born with it. Never were they more mistaken. There is no doubt that the woman whose perfect hand is structural has an advantage over her sister whose hand is not, but the ability to use the hand effectively and to make it a member of wondrous attraction and symmetry is largely a matter of cultivation and training, and this is within the reach of every woman, whether she be a butterfly of society or the housewife with the burden of homely duties resting upon her shoulders.

There are many different types of hands, and each bears marks which are peculiar to different classes of people. For instance, the hand that is square indicates a nature that is orderly, but one that is apt to be very set in reverence for traditional opinion. The hand that develops into square fingers, whose base is square even, is the hand of the man or woman who wins his or her way in life by sheer force of determination and constant application.

A type not coveted, yet infrequently seen, is the hand with large palm and few lines, which denotes an antipathy for the beautiful, the cultured, the refined, and which belongs

to the most undisciplined civilisation. There is, just to the contrary, the hand of the thinker, or the philosophic hand, long and rather angular, with bony fingers, long nails, and knuckles knotted with thought. The possessor of such a hand is ambitious usually, but seeks power through the medium of knowledge, studying mankind and all the mysteries of life.

There is also the hand of ideas—the versatile hand, which possesses no particular characteristic, but is rather a combination of the philosophic, the psychic, the practical, and the enterprising, but which, unfortunately, is indicative of erratic purpose.

Then there is the most beautiful of all hands—the artistic, with long tapering fingers, slightly tapering palm, and graceful in every movement. Those who possess such a hand are invariably interesting, impressionable, impetuous, and emotional, and more or less generous.

While the shape of the hand makes an interesting study, it must not be forgotten that the colour and texture of the skin of the hand is second in importance only to that of the face. Sensitive hands, with delicate skins, should seldom be washed with soap, there being many saponaceous powders which may be used instead. When one is compelled to do her own housework, the surest way of keeping the hands soft, white, and beautiful is to sleep in kid gloves upon which a cosmetic paste has been spread. A few moments each day with manicuring implements will keep the hands in good condition, once the treatment has been properly begun, and it is a duty which woman owes to her sex as well as to herself to see that her hands are ever manicured and fascinating.

HIS CAPACITY.—"Mrs. Talkington's husband ought to be a good listener." "He is. He can listen to nearly two hundred words a minute."

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A Young Wife's Dilemma.

A young wife wrote the other week to the editor of a ladies' paper asking the surest means of retaining her husband's affections. The reply was, "always be as attractive, look as pretty, and pay the same attention to him as you did during the days of courtship." It has to be admitted, however, that a woman's good looks are dependent to a great extent upon her health. Bile Beans for Billiousness are, in this connection, woman's greatest friend. They preserve the appetite, and thus ensure keeping up the strength. They stimulate the liver if inclined to be sluggish, thus ensuring energy and briskness. Their action on both liver and kidneys results in these organs being always regular in their action; and constipation, headache, nausea, and debility are thereby rendered highly improbable. The blood is purified, and the result of the occasional use of Bile Beans is seen in the sprightly step, the bright eye, the healthy colour, and the clear complexion. These qualities, which Bile Beans ensure, go far towards making a young lady attractive.

TROUBLES OF THE THIN WOMAN

The thin woman is usually a nervous woman who worries and frets, and if she does not keep herself really ill, she resists the acquirement of strength and flesh.

There are rules for the thin woman which, if followed, would soon fill the hollows and increase her supply of blood. She should make up her mind to follow these rules and then begin:

First, she should sleep ten hours out of the twelve each night, in a cool room well ventilated, and if any time is taken from the night hours it should be added to the morning's rest.

Much benefit is derived from a cup of rich chocolate and a roll taken before rising, which should not be earlier than nine, if possible.

Banish worry—the anticipation of troubles, fretting and unhappiness.

Rise, dress briskly, not in a lounging robe, but in a walking suit, and go out for a walk in the air. If this time can be given to errands such as shopping, it can be made double use of. Otherwise, after fifteen minutes the lungs are well filled, the circulation increased and the day well begun.

After a while there will be an increased appetite and breakfast or early lunch will be heraked with real delight.

The latter meal should be liberal, consisting of starchy vegetables, chops, fresh sweet butter, a glass of milk that contains cream, and French bread.

After this meal rest for an hour, then open the windows and take a few physical exercises—not violent or tiresome, but begin simple and add a new movement each day, or visit a first-class gymnasium and submit to an examination and take the exercises prescribed by the attendant physician. If it is impossible to join a gymnasium get a physical culture chart and practice the exercises outlined.

Diversion is excellent, where all thoughts of self are forgotten. Seek the society of happy, cheerful people, cultivate a sanguine temperament, and with foods properly digested and plenty of rest there will be little excuse for emaciation, unless there is some serious ailment to combat.

The thin individual seldom cares for sweets, but there is great latitude allowed, and where the digestion will permit, wholesome, pure sweets are recommended.

A NEW FOOD.—It appears that the horse chestnut is richer in the elements of nutrition than any other food, fruit, vegetable, or meat. The only reason why it is looked upon as unpleasant, if not poisonous, is the presence of certain oils. These, it is maintained, can easily be extracted, and by the process the country is assured an immense, almost inexhaustible, store of good food.

Facetiae

"HA! HA!" laughed Funnycus; "a joke!" "Ha! ha!" laughed his audience; "what is it?" "Ha! ha! a joke!"

SAMMY (admirably surveying his lately arrived twin sisters): "Did you get them cheaper by taking the two, papa?"

FANNE: "Are all canary birds yellow?" Mother: "Yes, my child." Fanny: "Well, how does a canary bird look when it has got the jaundice?"

PROFESSOR (to Student): "What do you mean, sir, by swearing in this room, before me?" Student: "I did not know that you wished to swear first, professor."

"I HATE this house cleaning business," sighed a disconsolate husband. "Wife, let's go and live in a tent." "Better live in content," suggested the wife, meekly.

MISS OEDMALT (school teacher): "How many million years old is the earth?" Bright Pupil: "Please, ma'am, I don't know." It was here when I come. How old is it?"

YOUNG LADY: "Whenever I dance with you, Mr. Crusher, I imagine myself to be a piano." Crusher: "How is that?" Young Lady: "Because you always use my feet as pedals."

"Do you quarrel with your neighbour yet about his hen coming over into your garden?" "No; we're all over that now." "Buried the hatchet?" "No, better still; buried the hen."

REASON ENOUGH:—"What reason is there for the notion that it is especially unlucky to marry in May?" "I don't know, unless it is that an especially large number of people have been married in May."

ONE TOO MANY.—Sallie Raitus: "How many languages do you speak, Polly?" Polly Glotte: "Eight. When I tackled the ninth I saw my finish." Sallie: "What was it?" Polly: "Finnish."

MR. GILMAN: "What have you done with my wife's pet poodle that I paid you ten shillings to steal?" Dog Thief Bill: "I returned it this morning, and got the two pound reward she offered for it."

TEACHER: "So you cannot remember the names of the great lakes? Can't you keep them in your head?" Johnny: "No, mum; if I was to keep them lakes in my head I might get water on the brain."

"HAVE you read Binks's book?" "Yes; and it makes me believe Binks must have a great mind." "Really?" "Yes; if he can understand what he has written he is a greater man than I have ever taken him for."

A NATURAL QUESTION.—Mrs. Hoon (in the midst of her reading): "Ah! Mrs. Congressman Swackhammer has started a crusade against décolleté gowns." Mr. Hoon: "H'm! Is Mrs. Congressman Swackhammer sensible or skinny?"

A DRUNKEN man will tumble out of a three-story window to a stone pavement, and get right up and dispute the distance with a neighbouring lamp post; but if a temperance speaker happens only to run his toe against a big stone, the result is a broken leg.

BRIDGET (to lady of the house): "Axin' your pardon, mum, but might I be after askin' phwat thim things is in the pictur?" Mistress: "Certainly. Those are Raphael's cherubs." Bridget: "Indade. Ah, thim, we was both wrong. I says they was twins, but Nora would 'av it they was bats."

MISS ETHEL: "Yes, indeed, we girls are fully alive to the justice of the popular criticism on chattering women, and that is the reason we organised our thought club." Mr. Blank: "Thought club?" "Yes, and it is doing us a world of good, I assure you." "I do not for one moment doubt it, Miss Ethel. Pray tell me how you proceed." "Well, at the last meeting we talked for five hours on the advantages of silent meditation."

PA'S IDEA OF SHIPS.—"What is an air-ship, pa?" "A ship that puts on airs, my son." "Is an air-ship, like other ships, called 'she'?" "Certainly. Didn't I just say that an air-ship was a ship that puts on airs?"

A RECENT American town has settled the social question in a novel manner. Those who put out their washing belong to the aristocracy; those who do their own laundry work are members of the middle-class; and those who take in washing form the lower class.

LADY LECTURER ON WOMAN'S RIGHTS (waxing warm): "Where would man be if it had not been for woman?" (After a pause, and looking around the hall): "I repeat, where would man be if it had not been for woman?" Voices from the Gallery: "In Paradise, ma'am."

THE thoughtful look that suddenly comes over the face of a good man when he pounds his thumb-nail with a hammer is due to his soul asking itself whether it will give up its hope of salvation for the pleasure of saying about just what it thinks in the first words that come handy.

"I SEE that they are telling fortunes by the foot instead of the hand," said Timley. "It is an excellent method," said Tumbel. "I read my own fortune in that way once." "How so?" "I was about to ask for Miss Biddle's hand that I might know it, when her father's foot revealed it to me."

ELSIE: "Yes, dear, my husband is a doctor and a lovely fellow, but he is awfully absent-minded." Ada: "Indeed!" Elsie: "Only fancy! During the marriage ceremony, when he gave me the ring, he felt my pulse and asked me to put out my tongue." Ada: "Well, he won't do the latter again."

A YOUNG Bedfordshire farmer at a cattle show, where he made himself conspicuous by his bluster, cried out: "Call those prize cattle! Why, they ain't nothin' to what our folks reared. My father raised the biggest calf of any man round our parts." "No doubt of it," said a bystander, "and the noisiest."

MAMMA (to three-year-old daughter): "Frances, pick up your playthings and put them all away." Frances: "In a minute, mamma. Oh, let's play you's baby and I's mamma." "All right, Frances; now I'm baby and you are mamma." "Well, now baby can pick up her playthings, and put 'em away."

YOUTHFUL MASHER (in the barber's chair): "I say, do you think that I'll ever have a moustache?" Barber (after thorough examination): "Well, I can't say as I do." Youthful Masher: "Hem! that's vewy odd. Why, my guv'nor has a twemden moustache." Barber: "Ah! that may be; but perhaps you take after your ma."

"YES, Charles, I have determined to give up the muse. I shall write no more." "Why, Thomas, the world will pine for the lyrics of your pen. And will you be so heartless?" "Yes, Charles, I must. I write for fame, and what is fame? Even now the world denies Homer an existence, and declares Shakespeare an imposter. I cannot, I will not subject myself to inevitable indignity."

A GREY hair was espied among the raven locks of a fair friend of ours a few days ago. "Oh, pray pull it out!" she exclaimed. "If I pull it out, ten will come to the funeral," replied the lady who had made the unwelcome discovery. "Pluck it out nevertheless," said the dark-haired damsel; "it is no sort of consequence how many came to the funeral, provided they all come in black."

BIGGS: "A friend of mine got off a bright thing the other day. He called on a young lady who had a pet dog she was trying to make bark, but the dog wouldn't, until finally she said, 'Fido, if you will bark for me, I'll kiss you.' Then my friend spoke up and said, 'I can bark pretty well myself.' Griggs: "Ha, ha! What did the girl say?" Briggs: "Nothing. She simply sent the dog away."

MISTAKES TO AVOID

It is a great mistake to set up our own standard of right and wrong and judge people accordingly.

To measure the enjoyment of others by our own.

To expect uniformity of opinion in this world.

To look for judgment and experience in youth.

To endeavour to mould all dispositions alike.

To look for perfection in our own actions.

To worry ourselves and others with what cannot be remedied.

Not to yield on immaterial matters.

Not to alleviate all that needs alleviation as far as lies in our power.

Not to make allowances for the infirmities of others.

To consider everything impossible that we cannot perform.

To believe only what our finite minds can grasp.

To expect to be able to understand everything.

THE SPRING-TIME

Live as much in the spring-time in the country as you can; you do not know what leaf-form means unless you have seen the buds burst and the young leaves breathing low in the sunshine, and wondering at the first shower of rain. But, above all, accustom yourself to look for and to love all nobleness of gesture and feature in the human form; and remember that the highest nobleness is usually among the aged, the poor, and the infirm; you will find in the end that it is not the strong arm of the soldier, nor the laugh of the young beauty, that are the best studies for you. You must love the creatures to whom you minister; your fellow-men; for if you do not love them, not only will you be little interested in the passing events of life, but in all your gazing at humanity you will be left to be struck only by outside form, and not by expression. It is only kindness and tenderness which will ever enable you to see what beauty there is in the dark eyes that are sunk with weeping, and in the paleness of those fixed faces which the world's adversity has compassed about, till they shine in their patience like dying watchfires through twilight.

SYMPATHY.

Not by sorrow or by sighing

Can we lift the heavy load

Of the poor, the sick, the dying

Whom we meet upon the road;

For we only help when bringing

Faith and courage to their need,

When we set the joy bells ringing

In their hearts by word and deed.

By the glow of thoughts uplifted

To God's everlasting hills,

We can melt away the drifted

Snow some lonely life that fills;

By the hand-clasp strong, unfailing,

Thrilling hope from palm to palm,

We can nerve some soul for scaling

Heights that rise in sunny calm.

All around are those who linger,

Weak, despairing, full of fear,

While with feeble beckoning finger

They implore us to draw near.

Let us pour the oil of gladness

On their hopeless misery,

Banishing their grief and sadness

By our radiant sympathy.

A lady who keeps a highly respectable boarding-house in the city caught the recently hired chambermaid kissing one of the boarders, so she told the servant that would never do. "I saw you kissing one of the boarders on the stairs. I don't want to see that again," said the indignant landlady. "Well, mum, nobody can compel ye to kape yer eyes open if ye don't want to," was the reply.

Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

CONSTANT READER.—I do not think that you can remedy the greasy surface of the silk, but you might try ironing it with a damp cloth between the silk (wrong side) and the iron. If this fails, sponge with Benzoline, and leave in the open air to dry.

G. E. L.—The following formula is very lasting and highly recommended for use in wardrobes, closets, and bureau drawers:—Extract of rose, 1 pint; extract of neroli, 6 ounces; tincture of vanilla, 1 quart; tincture of ambergris, 14 drams; oil of bitter almonds, 15 drops.

GRACE.—There would be no impropriety in your writing to your betrothed again without hearing from him. His neglect in failing to answer your last letter may have been caused by temporary illness, business engagements, or by other reasons, and not through inconstancy to your fair self. I think you are unreasonably jealous of the slight attentions he paid your girl friend before he left on his present business trip.

I. CARR.—I have no knowledge of the firm you mention, and should advise you to be very careful how you deal with any who advertise in the way you mention; you will most likely find yourself saddled with a lot of worthless, useless stuff, for which you have been made to pay pretty smartly. They will never give you any work, or take any of your doing, when once they have made you buy their wares.

COUNTRY BOY.—According to a celebrated authority on such matters, "when about to shave, never fail to wash your beard with soap and cold water, and to rub it dry immediately before you apply the lather, of which the more you use, and the thicker it is, the easier you will shave." Razors should always be wiped clean and stropped before putting away, and the shaving-brush put aside with the lather on it.

GERMAN.—Nothing that I can recommend to you will heal the sores on the lips unless the habit of continually biting them is discontinued. I can quite understand that the shape of the mouth is becoming disfigured in consequence, but the remedy lies with yourself. As soon as you have conquered the habit the lips will heal, and the soreness gradually disappear; until you make up your mind to do this I am afraid I cannot help you.

DIEMIGLTY.—You ask for my opinion; it is this: There should be no secrets between husband and wife. Tell your husband everything. The same remarks apply in the case you name. No feeling of shame should arise in the matter; it seems to me the simplest thing in the world to confide implicitly and wholly in the man you love, and who loves you beyond all people and beyond all things.

FORMICA.—Ants that frequent houses or gardens may be destroyed by taking flour of brimstone, half a pound, and potash, 4 oz.; set them in an iron or earthenware pan over the fire till dissolved and united; afterwards beat them to a powder, and infuse a little of this powder in water. Wherever you sprinkle the ants will die or leave the place. Corrosive sublimate, mixed well with sugar, has proved a mortal poison to them, and is a most effectual way of destroying these insects. As the nest is under the foundation of the inner wall, I fear you cannot get to it; but if it were possible to open the nest and put in quicklime all the ants would be destroyed in a very short time.

MISTA.—This hair tonic is good to coax a depleted crown of glory to grow to be decent: Seven ounces of listerine, one-half ounce of tincture of cantharides, on drachm of bisulphate of quinine. Apply every night with a medicine dropper, rubbing it in well with the finger tips. It is just as well to remember that the general health has much to do with the length and thickness and beauty of the hair.

GRETCHE.—The only positive cure for blackheads is the face scrubbing brush. Get a soft brush, and when retiring give the face a thorough scrubbing with hot water and a pure hygienic soap. Follow this by a rinse with cold water. The face should be washed in the same way in the morning. Blackheads result from accumulations of dust, etc., in the skin, and the surest way to remain free of them is to keep the face scrupulously clean. Wear a veil when you go out, and if the skin should be irritated after the first treatment do not be alarmed, for after two or three applications the soreness will not only pass away, but you will get so accustomed to the brush that you will feel that it is impossible to be without one.

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DIANA.—Persian insect powder is composed of the powdered flowers of pyrethrum, carum and roseum, plants which grow on the Caucasian Mountains of Persia. The above powder is not poisonous to man unless inhaled or swallowed in very large quantities, but is death to insect life in all its forms, first stupefying, and then killing.

D. A. T.—A good face brush can be procured for less than five shillings, and the bristles should be soft, so as not to injure the skin. A few drops of tincture of benzoin, which is made by cutting benzoin gum with alcohol, poured into a bowl of water, make a refreshing bath for the face, and tend to contract the pores of the skin.

K. O. B. (Horne Bay).—To make the best cold cream, take of pale oil of almonds, four ounces; white wax, one ounce; spermaceti, half an ounce; attar of roses, twenty drops; distilled water, three ounces; powdered borax, twenty grains. Melt the wax and spermaceti with gentle heat, then add the borax in warm solution, then the rest of the water, stirring constantly, and when nearly cold, add the other ingredients.

RENER.—The following prescription will be found invaluable for the hair which is beginning to come out much, as it so often does at this season of the year:—Simmer half a pound of rosemary in a pint of distilled water for six hours. Strain it through gauze, and when cold add six ounces of bay rum and a small quantity of oil of roses. Rub it well into the roots of the hair every night, and brush with a soft-bristled brush for twenty minutes.

JENNIE.—Parents are right in insisting on knowing the contents of letters received by a young daughter who continues to correspond with a questionable character whom they have forbidden her to associate with in any way. As you are only sixteen, I would advise you to respect your parents' wishes, not only in regard to the selection of your correspondents, but in all matters of importance. They are your best friends, and have your welfare at heart as no others ever can.

JAMES.—Having become engaged to the object of your choice, your wish to win the esteem of your fiancée's family is commendable. To accomplish this, endeavour to accommodate yourself to their ways and habits, and be always ready to consult their wishes and tastes, especially those of the young lady's mother, in whose good graces, for obvious reasons, it will be well to establish yourself before you become her son-in-law. By acting discreetly on the above hints you will find little difficulty in acquiring a good standing with your future wife's relations.

F. H. K.—If there is not too much difference in the size of your hips, the difficulty may be remedied by massage. The following is an excellent food: Juice of lily bulbs, 60 grammes; honey, 40 grammes; white wax, 30 grammes. Take exercises which will bring into play the smaller hip, and do not exercise the larger one as much as the smaller. Exercise and massage are of great importance in physical development, and must be employed constantly and regularly to produce good results. At the same time, it would be very beneficial to take mechanical massage for the larger hip, and this will reduce its size.

ETTA.—I do not wonder that the skin of your neck has a yellow hue, if you have been using cocoa butter constantly. Try the mixture for which I give the formula: Strained cucumber juice, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup; rosewater, 1 cup; elder flower water, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup; pure alcohol, 1 drachm; boracic acid, in powder, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoonfuls; tincture of benzoin, 30 drops. Apply with a velvet sponge or soft cloth.

WORKER.—The quickest way of softening and whitening your hands is by the use of cosmetic gloves, which should be worn at night. Draw on the gloves after having coated them with the following paste: Myrrh, 1 ounce; honey, 4 ounces; yellow wax, 2 ounces; rosewater, 6 ounces. Melt the wax in a custard boiler; add the myrrh, which should be powdered while hot. Beat thoroughly together, then stir in the honey and rosewater and sufficient glycerin, little by little, to make a "spreadable" paste. Suede gloves about four sizes too large are best. Cut off the tops of the fingers, and perforate the palms to admit the air.

PLAIN JANE.—1. No, it is bad form to eat sweets or anything else in the theatre. 2. The frocks for a girl of sixteen should be cut ankle length. Dress your hair loosely, and wear it in a small coil low at the back. One tiny curl before each ear, over the cheek would look smart. The general style of dressing the hair, however, depends upon the features, the height of the brow and the kind of hair, whether curly or straight. 3. If you will take my advice you will not tamper with your eyes or eyelashes. If they are affected, consult an oculist, but do not apply lotions otherwise. Your own treatment might injuriously affect your sight.

VICTOR.—The duties of the best man at a wedding are to attend to all the details of that part of the wedding ceremony after which the bridegroom would otherwise have to look, such as, if the wedding be at the church, seeing that everything is in readiness there, handing the clergyman his fee, and also distributing gratuities to those entitled, standing beside the bridegroom until the time comes for the bride to enter the church, holding the bridegroom's hat, taking charge of the ring, seeing that the carriages are in waiting to take the bridesmaids to the house, and also to see that the carriage is ready to take the bride and bridegroom from the house to the train.

ANTI-TOBACCO writes: "The man to whom I am engaged is an inveterate smoker, and all I can say or plead has no effect upon him. I get very angry at times, and my friends tell me that I should not act as I do towards him. Will you kindly tell me whether or not I am doing right? Should I let it pass and say nothing more about it?"—Men have a right to decide whether they shall smoke or not. Where it is injurious they usually give it up of their own accord. No man, however, should make himself a slave to the habit to the discomfort of everyone around him. I should endeavour to persuade him to smoke less often, rather than give it up entirely, as he is so set against carrying out your wishes to the letter. If you annoy him too much it will spoil his disposition, and, to use a smoker's philosophy, he will smoke more than ever "for the consolation the habit brings."

CURLY LOCKS.—There are various ways of curling the hair, but no possible way of bringing a natural curl. The hot tongs are certainly injurious, because only one woman in fifty can curl her tresses without burning off half her "bun." As for curling papers—the saints save us from them! They are suggestive of everything that is unlovely and untidy. What's the use of curling your hair, anyway. Fluff it up by combing the wrong way underneath, and let it go straight and smooth.

HARRIET wants to know if, having received a note from a man apologising for being unable to keep an engagement to spend the evening with her, she should answer, naming another evening? She also asks if it is proper for a girl to ask a man for his photograph. It is unnecessary to reply to his note of apology. It would be perfectly correct to name another evening for him to call if he asks it. It is not considered good form to ask a man for his photograph.

ANDREW.—John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was born at Epworth in 1703. He organised the first Methodist society in Bristol, April 2, 1739. In person Wesley has been described as rather below the medium height of man, but finely proportioned, without an atom of superfluous flesh, yet muscular and strong, with a bright, penetrating eye, a lovely face, and a fresh complexion, which he retained to the last days of his life. He died March 2, 1791, in the eighty-eighth year of his age.

ROSA.—There is really no effective way of producing dimples unless you go to a dermatologist and have them made artificially. Then I am afraid that you will not be satisfied for the reason that the dimple will always be apparent whether you are smiling or the face is in repose. It is claimed that pressing the end of the finger against the chin or cheek for five minutes several times a day helps to produce dimples.

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